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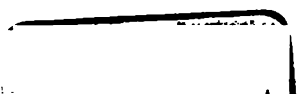
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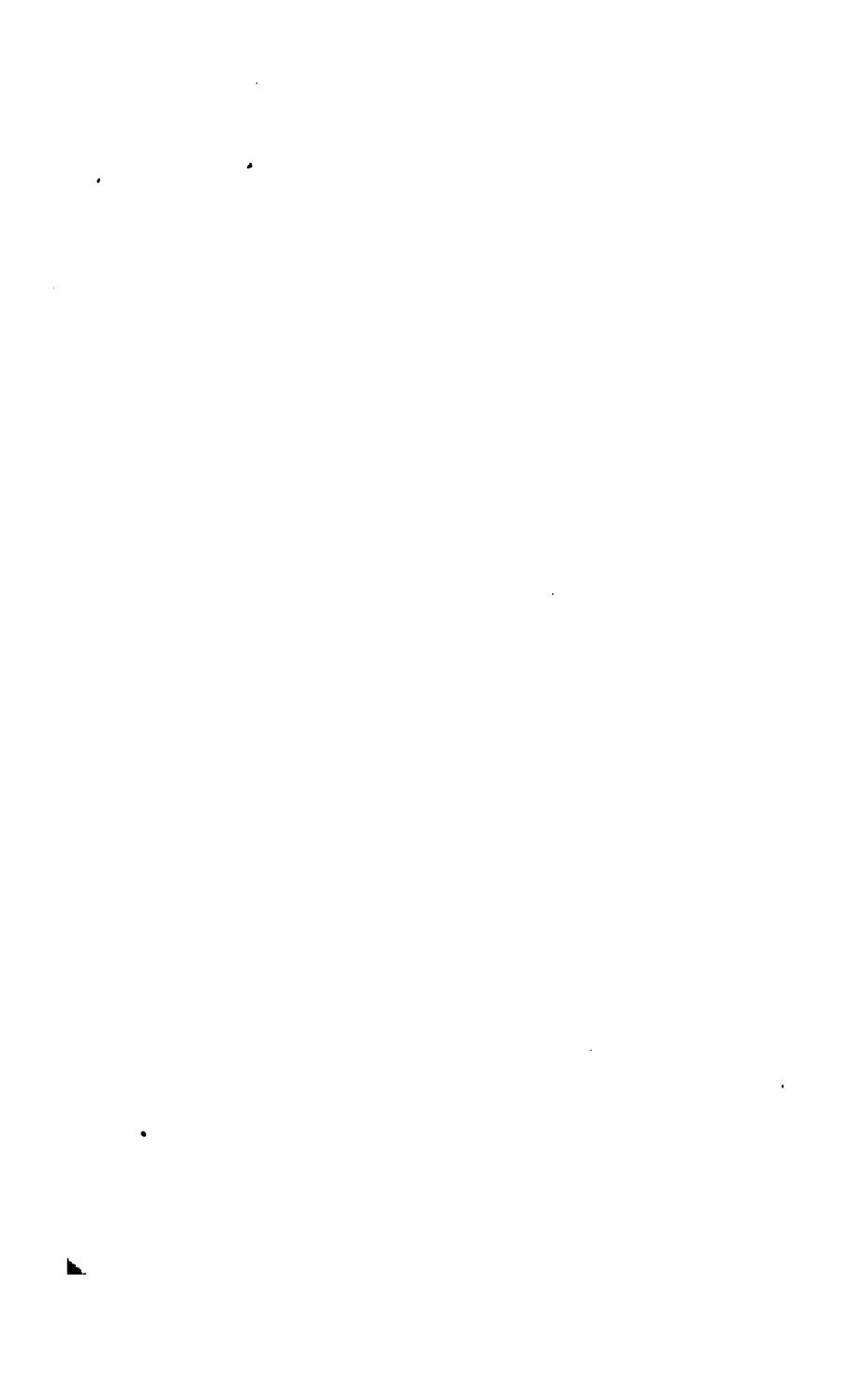
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THE
LAST OF THE CAVALIERS.

Fare thee well, great heart !
Ill-weaved ambition, how much art thou shrunk !

* * * * *

Thy ignomy sleep with thee in the grave,
But not remembered in thy epitaph.

KING HENRY THE FOURTH, PART I.

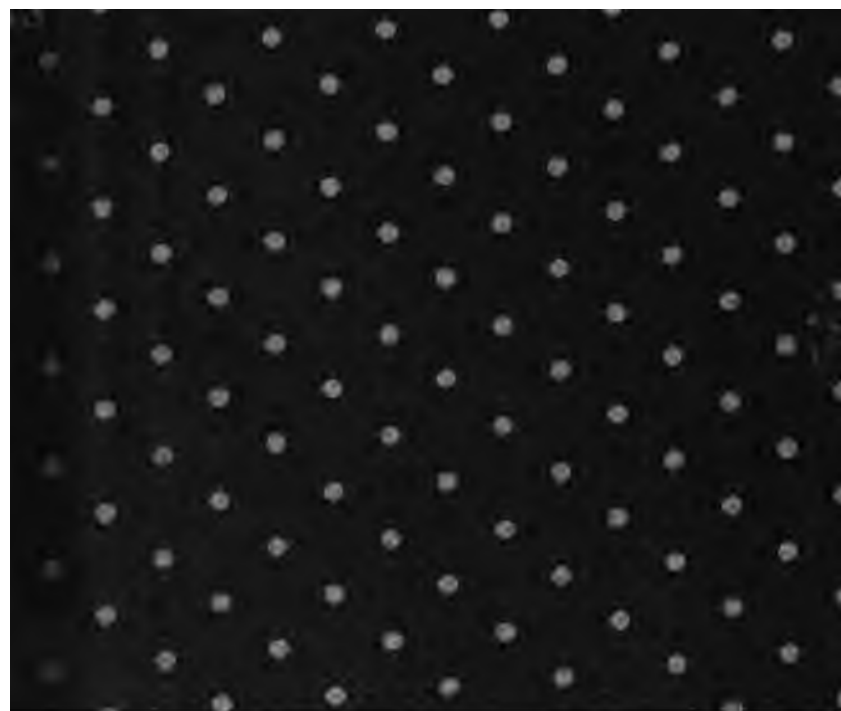
IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE
LAST OF THE CAVALIERS.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE KING'S HEAD.

Either I mistake your shape and meaning quite,
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Called Robin Goodfellow.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

ON the very day when the destinies of a realm and a family of princes hung wavering in the balance, we again resume the interrupted thread of our heroine's story, which the reader will perhaps be inclined to accuse us (with some justice) of having neglected for less interesting and less immediately pertinent details.

As evening drew on, and Lord Glencarrig was preparing to enter upon his first independent adventure on the theatre of life, as soon as the friendly darkness should be thick enough to secure him from the prying observation of some who watched his kinsman's movements and his own too narrowly, our

gentle Alice was entering the town almost at the opposite point to that by which he intended to leave it, and—had he but guessed it!—thinking, although not exclusively, of him.

She had walked out that afternoon with Janet to visit a poor family in the vicinity of Libberton, a hamlet about three miles south of Edinburgh, and was coming home alone, for the old dame had remained behind to nurse a sick woman, who had earnestly entreated the assistance of her charitable skill. Alice had proposed to share her watch, but upon this Janet had put a peremptory veto, for the young girl had been ailing slightly for several days past; so Janet bid her go quietly home and to rest early, promising to return with the first peep of day—and Alice had smilingly obeyed.

On her way to the town she had turned a little out of the road to see her mother's pretty grave, now decked with the first blossoms of spring—an indulgence which the limited time at her disposal rendered rare and precious to Alice. She had spent a longer time than usual near the low green mound which sheltered her parent's remains; and, although she had shed but few tears over it—although her prayers had been peaceful and sweet—the visit had tended to depress her sensitive spirits, and she felt less able to rally than was her wont. She was tired, too, with her long excursion; and something in the aspect of the country—in the breath of the wind as it fanned her face—in the very perfume of the mild air, made her feel melancholy.

The spring was coming on very early, and at that delightful hour the prospect was exquisitely lovely ; the sky of that delicate greyish azure, which, far more than the most brilliant blue of winter, suggests to the eye the warmth and geniality of coming summer ; the trees, yet bare of leaves, held up their graceful interlaced branches as if invoking clear dews and bright days to swell their tiny buds ; the hedges were already sprouting, the breeze was soft and fitful, the fresh ploughed earth, the springing grass and humid vegetation, loaded it with that faint aromatic scent no other season gives. Alice gazed and mused pensively, stopping every now and then to gather a solitary flower ; for she loved, like Isaac, to meditate in the fields at even ; but withal overcome by gushes of indescribable sadness, which, whether regret or foreboding, seemed always borne to her on the floating breeze, and to be mysteriously connected with it.

As she strolled slowly along, trying in all earnest simplicity to feel happy and unrepining, and to enjoy the beauty of the evening scene, she took from the little case which she wore about her Flora's letter, received a fortnight before, and read it over for the twentieth time. It was a transcript of Flora—that is to say, chaming, lively, gossiping, and diffuse ; the merry spirit of the writer struggling at every line through the stiff formality which cramped the epistolary effusions of our great grandmothers, and brightening the four wide pages with the reflex of her pleasant self, just sobered the least bit in the world by an amusing attempt at matronly gravity, which was

sure to break down after the first sentence, and lose itself in some fond remembrance of their past intercourse or impracticable scheme for their speedy re-union. It did not contain much news—general information had never been Flora's forte; but Alice learned from it that she had seen Lord Glencarrig in London, and was herself to start in a few days for Paris, where their mother still remained. Also, that the countess confidently hoped to be able to reach Scotland at the end of the summer, either to settle there again, or, if circumstances (Flora did not specify what, but Alice concluded them to refer to Lord Glencarrig's engagements with the Jacobite party) made that impracticable, to bring Alice back with her—a consummation devoutly wished for by Flora.

"I have seen David this morning," was the conclusion of this sisterly epistle. "He is here with my cousin of Dundee. I am prouder than ever of both; but my heart is sair to think of our unfortunate King, and the kind and beautiful Queen, and her poor innocent babe; sairer still at the dangers my kinsfolk must run into for their sake. Glencarrig is much changed, but he loves you still, my white rose; and, of a verity, though it is his greatest misfortune, I could find it in my heart to say that I should not love him so well if he loved thee less."

"Dear, dear Flora!" said Alice, sighing; "kind, foolish Flora! who had ever such friends as I? and who can deserve them less? I am just a grief to them all!"

Across the last page was scribbled, in an irregular,

hasty hand, an intimation that Flora, having just heard of her brother's immediate departure for Scotland with Lord Dundee's small troop of horse, preferred committing her letter to his care instead of entrusting it to the ordinary courier, a precaution at which Alice rejoiced, as an epistle from Lady Glencarrig, mentioned by her daughter, had never come to hand—an occurrence easily accounted for in those days, but none the more agreeable to the losers by it.

She had perused Flora's letter twice over—smiled at some passages, and sighed deeply over others—she had bestowed many kind sisterly regretful thoughts on the young earl, and kissed repeatedly every letter of Lord Dundee's name, and looked at it as if the small cramped characters owned a glamour to prevent her ever detaching her eyes from them; she had even folded up the paper once to put it away, and opened it again by some unreasonable craving to make sure of *one* word not having vanished; then, as the evening was beginning to fall, she rose from the grassy bank where she had been resting, and deliberated within herself whether she would return to her own lodging, or, as there was plenty of light for the walk, betake herself to that of Lady Libberton, who had desired her attendance to receive an order. She might have postponed it; but work had not been so plentiful as usual with Alice of late, and she did not wish to risk displeasing a person who, with all her eccentricities, had been kind to herself and her mother when they greatly needed it, on their first arrival in that wilderness of a great city. Alice remembered

the dowager's extreme love of dress, and, good-natured as ever, thought it best not to distress her by any unnecessary delay in the execution of what was sure to be some elaborate and magnificent piece of female vanity.

She could not help laughing to herself at the ludicrous offences against good taste of which her old patroness had often been guilty, and her internal amusement, together with her reflections on Flora's letter, gave her enough to think of until she arrived in the vicinity of the King's Head Tavern, before which she had to pass on her way through Bristo Street. A number of gentlemen were entering or approaching it, such as were mounted followed by their servants, and Alice was obliged to stand aside until the slight crowd occasioned by their passage should have cleared away from the narrow causeway. While standing thus, sorrowfully observing that nearly all were strangers to her, or at least that one familiar form was not amongst them, she was clasped from behind by a pair of small arms, and a shrill, childish voice cried in her ear :

“ Ou, he is baith a laird an' a lord !
D'ye think I'd marry a cadie ? ”

“ Jock, ye daft gilpie, let me be ! ” exclaimed the girl, with unusual sharpness of tone, for she could not be mistaken as to the speaker. “ Are ye not ashamed of yourself ? ”

“ Are ye no ashamed o' yer ainsel', Elsie Scott, that gets letters frae yer jo, and reads them as ye gang along the plain stanes ? ” retorted the mischievous

laughing voice ; and the owner thereof, without relinquishing his hold of Alice, moved round in front of her, displaying to view a countenance which for its comical mixture of drollery, impudence, and good humour, ought by rights to have rested on the shoulders of an Irish gossoon instead of an Edinburgh *gamin*, to use an expression for which there is no English equivalent.

The thickest imaginable crop of reddish sandy hair, the most tanned and freckled of skins, the widest of mouths, the most irregular of teeth, and the brightest and wittiest of blue eyes, were this young gentleman's distinctive attractions, surmounting a figure short for his age, which seemed about fourteen. He was the younger son of Dame Christie Maclean, hostess of the thriving and well-frequented house of entertainment above named, and widow of a sergeant in the Scots Greys, who, having been disabled by wounds, had retired into private life, wooed and won a well-to-do burgher's only daughter and heiress, and, on the demise of his father-in-law, come into possession of the good estate which his relict now held in her own right and cultivated skilfully. The veteran, Neil Maclean by name, had long ago abandoned the field of matrimonial strife—the first in which he had ever been on the losing side—leaving Dame Christie in undisputed rule over the tenement, business, and appurtenances thereof, as well as over two sons—the elder a steady, well-looking youth of two or three and twenty, who shared with his mother the management of the hostelry, the

second being the subject of our present remarks, the plague of the dame's life, the scapegrace and scapegoat of the family, and, we need not add, a most intelligent and promising pupil of all the wildest blades in the neighbourhood; kind-hearted withal, perfectly good-tempered and affectionate, not a bad boy in the main, and a most ardent admirer of Alice, to whom, during her mother's last sickness, Dame Christie had done much kindness, and intended more.

If we must admit, which we are loath to do, that Alice *had* a fault or a weakness, it was a dislike, excusable from the tenor of her education, to holding familiar intercourse with people who, although on her own social level, had never received any polish superior to that station, and whom she could not avoid regarding as inferiors. She did not intend to show pride, the feeling was rather one of extreme shyness and reserve; she would have nursed them in sickness, or aided them in affliction without one particle of repulsion; but Alice was a lady born—one of Nature's own making—and she *suffered* from any lengthened contact with the rude and boisterous manners to which she had never been inured in those early years when the tastes and habits are most firmly moulded. Therefore, while often reproaching herself for the neglect, her visits to Dame Christie were by no means so frequent as to content that worthy woman, who, like most people who knew Alice, was exceedingly fond of her.

Jock had by this time dragged his fair prize into the wide, low-roofed entry of the spacious house;

and she, on her part, had brought her mind to bear upon the fact that she still held Flora's letter open in her hand, and was now folding it up and putting it into its place with a care which drew down upon her a fresh shower of laughing and teasing from the boy.

"Is he a laird or a lord? or, may be, an airle?" suggested Jock, grinning—most diabolically, Alice thought, as she tried to get rid of him.—"The lassock-quean in the ballant was married on the bonnie young Airle o' Aboyne—an' mairover had a canny little babie ——"

"Behave yourself, Jock! or I shall tell your mother," said Alice, quite aware however of the futility of the threat. "I am on my way to Lady Libberton's, and cannot stay a minute."

"It will be the airle then," said Jock, with an air of profound conviction, "for ye are grown as cauld and crouse as pride can make ye, and havena a word to throw to a tyke, Madam Alice. My mither breaks her heart for ye—it's a gey tough ane too—and Neil! Neil's just deecin' wi' love. Eh, Alice! Heaven forgie ye! ye hae muckle to answer for!"

"Oh, Jock! *do* let me away!" said Alice, with a vexed laugh at the boy's solemn absurdity, and perhaps a ridiculous consciousness of having been the object of some undeveloped machinations on the part of Neil's shrewd mother. "I'll come and see them all another day."

"They'll be dead before ye can win back," replied Jock, gripping her tighter than ever; "my brither

Neil is nae mair than a ghaist wi' dwining—the sort that's a' banes. Whiles he flits round about like a bogle—an' whiles he granes and sighs, sitting in the ingle neuk like a pelican in the wilderness—and whiles he gangs saftly like ane that mourneth for his mother, as auld King Davie says in the Psawms. I havena seen ashes on his head yet; but I doubtna he wad strew them there if they could get leave to stay—forby that his grey sark is no that unlike sack-cloth. It's just awfu'."

"Oh, Jock, you false wicked boy! when you ken that in six weeks your brother is to marry Eppie Fleming," said Alice, trying to look angry.

"Eppie Fleming is but a cutty-quean compared to you, Elsie, and if I had a jo—but I havena yet—I would take you, and never anither lassie in Edinburgh."

"Many thanks!—now, perhaps, you will let me go?"

"Bide a wee till I speak to ye, woman! Winna ye come and see the gathering? There's routh o' fine company."

"That is nothing uncommon, is it?" said Alice.

"It is and it isna; this is something by ordinar, ye ken."

"How?"

"Eh, eh! I hear what I hear, and I see what I see. A' they gentles and cavaliers are no sittin' wi' closed doors, neither eatin' nor drinkin', nor playing at dice, and cards, and shovelboard, for naething. And there's folk here the night that's no used to come for pleasure."

"What for are they come then, and of whom speak

ye, Jock?" asked Alice, not attempting to leave him, although in the boy's eagerness to impress upon her the magnitude of his own discoveries he had released her, and was standing with his forefinger on his nose, looking inimitably sagacious and discreet.

"There's wark brewing for the Whig bodies, or my name's no Jock—hard wark and het brose. There's mair than thretty o' the gret folk, young an' auld, in the muckle oak room—talk, talk, talk, and jaw, jaw, jaw—ilka man wi' rapier and pistols, and dark brow and wild e'en, as if they were met for a council o' war, sic as my daddy, puir creature! has telled me o'."

"You have been spying, Jock! how dared you?" said Alice, reproachfully.

"Hoots, woman! what's a man's e'en and his lugs gi'en him for, if it isna to speir after ilka thing that comes in his gate? It'll be a sorry day and an unco' ane when Jock shuts *his*. The mither flytes at me, and screighs like a night-owl because I'm aye on the tramp, and winna bide at hame, and rin and serve like Neil; by token, I was just now sitting my lane up in a mirk little tod's hole under the stair, and I only stole awa' down to get a keek at the new comers' horses. I'm looking out for my Lord Dundee's, he has aye the grandest beasts in Edinburgh."

"Is he not here?" said Alice, with a beating heart.

"Na, but he'll be coming anon, for I heard Maister Patrick Johnstone (that's his ain serving man) tell my mither sae half an hour syne. Aweel, Alice, I was saying how I sat up in a bit closet under the stair, there's a vizzly-hole intill't, nae bigger than my hand,

that's ower the muckle clock—and whenever ye keek thro' it ye can see ilka nook and corner o' the oak room, and hear something forbye. It maun ha' been made for a hiding place in the ill times, I'm thinking; and there's naebody kens the gate of it but me. The auld mither's gleg c'en havena found *that* yet, and mony's the time I hac lain there, and laughed till the tears ran ower my cheeks at the braw sights I could see below, while mammy rampaged up and down the stair, crying upon me frae rooftree to cellar—Hark till her, noo!”

In point of fact an irate female voice had several times become disagreeably prominent through the combined sounds of the street noises and Jock's voluble chatter; it now ascended more imperative than ever from some lower region.

“Jock, ye deevil! come ben instanter! div' ye hear?”

“Na, mither!” replied Jock, at the top of his voice, “I dinna!”

“Come ben, I tell ye!”

“Come and fetch me!” shouted the incorrigible Jock, laughing all the louder at Alice's mild remonstrances on his impertinence.

“Fetch ye, ay! wait till I fetch ye! I'll learn ye to be daidlin' about—leaving me and Neil to destroy wersels wi' labour, and you never doing a hand's turn, but aye glaikering an' sniggling wi' limmer lasses at yer auld mither's vera door-stane, ye precocious cheat the wuddie!”

This objurgatory oration, originally commenced in some basement story, the entrance to which was ob-

scured by the growing dusk (although it was still quite light without), was continued upon the ascent, concluded in the entry, and neatly finished off by the enraged rhetorician twisting one hand in Jock's collar, and administering with the other a succession of cuffs, of which the concluding one or finale sent that impenitent delinquent staggering against the wall.

"Take yersel' aff! trot! march! awa' wi' ye doun the stair, and dinna let me come to speech o' ye again the night or I'll gar ye howl for it!"

"The deil's in ye, mither!" remonstrated the culprit, hastily shielding his head with his elbow from the descent of another annihilating attack. "Ye're no that ceevil! may be ye didna see Elsie Scott whenever ye spake o' limmer lassies!"

The buxom hostess, who had hitherto been so intent upon the chastisement of her vagrant offspring as to have bestowed no consideration upon the innocent occasion of his offence, being thus recalled to a sense of social propriety, stared round in great amaze.

"Mistress Alice! my certie, lassie, I'm surprised to see ye! I've no clapped e'en on ye since Yule-tide! Eh, dearie, I beg your pardon, I'm sure!" And the good-natured woman kissed her heartily.

"I wadna ha' skelpit him that gate if I had minded to look wha ye were; but ou, he's a vex! I canna live in peace the day, nor sleep in my bed nights, for his wild ways, and his rampaging and stravaquing aboot wi' rapescallions and blackguards, never lifting sae muckle as a finger to do a stroke;

while there's Neil, puir fallow! the best and doucest lad ——"

"Ay, and the canniest, and the safest spoken, and the dourest, and maist hard-fisted——there noo, mammy, let a-be; yer ain fists is waur than cannon balls, and my lugs is made o' flesh an' bluid!"

His mother here made a fresh onslaught, and by dint of wonderful exertions of lungs and arms contrived to force him towards the dusky opening to those subterranean regions whence she had emerged, and into which he plunged with a shrill whoop of defiance like a demoniacal goblin.

Dame Christie, as she was always called, would fain have persuaded Alice to remain and share their evening meal, but without success, and the young girl, after thanking her for the offered hospitality, left the tavern to try and reach Lady Libberton's house before dusk. She was rather annoyed and ruffled at having been made a witness of the noisy contention between mother and son, which had disturbed the current of her meditations, just as the image of some coarse though amusing scene by Teniers or Ostade might efface from the retina the sweet vision of a woodland landscape from the magic hand of Ruysdael. The whole thing, ridiculous as it was, jarred on her nerves, and she could not readily gather up into their former pleasing though chequered web the broken threads of her bitter-sweet fancies.

"Ye are late o' coming, Alice," said Eppie Fleming, the dowager of Libberton's maid, meeting Alice as she entered the stone-floored corridor of the house

where that distinguished lady resided, in one of the closes which divided the irregular-shaped block of ancient buildings comprised within the Grass Market, the West Bow, and the western extremity of the Cowgate; for, not possessing an independent city establishment and mansion, she was forced, like innumerable others of far higher rank, to content herself with a small portion of one of those vast constructions which in our days excite the wonder of strangers who behold them for the first time.

"Ay, Eppie, but I would not disappoint my lady," replied Alice.

"Ye'll no see her yet awhile," said Eppie, who filled the troublesome office of tirewoman and waiting maid to the old coquette. She was a blithe, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed damsel—which charms, re-inforced by a saucy tongue and a good temper, had so overcome the susceptible soul of young Neil Maclean as to have induced the matrimonial overtures already referred to.

"Why should I not?" asked Alice.

"Because Madam Brand, the Provost's wife, and the auld leddy o' Inverleith are up yonder wi' her, and when ance they get to their cracks, pykin' holes in ilka man's coat, there's nae end till't. A sair time a' the puir lassies has then that's sae misfortunate as to be young and bonnie, I trow! But wait ye there, Alice dearie, and I'll try what can be dune."

Alice waited accordingly, and presently down came Eppie, laughing.

"She canna speak wi' ye this minute, and she winna

wait ower the Sabbath—sae it'll just behove ye to take patience. Dinna stand there, Alice—na, nor sit neither on that cauld stane bench, ye'll be the death o' yersel'. Come in hither."

The pretty soubrette, so saying, opened the door of a room on the ground floor and beckoned Alice in.

"Whose chamber is this? not yours, Eppie," said our heroine, pausing on the threshold.

"Mine! na, na! my lady needs to hae me nearer than that to cry upon me by day or night. Thanks be to Praise, I'll get quieter sleep sunc," she added, laughing merrily.

"But, Eppie, how comes it that you can enter a stranger's apartments?" said Alice doubtfully.

"Tuts, woman!" replied Eppie smartly, giving her a little push in the side, "the door's never on the lock, because there's naething to lift. Ye'll find thae muckle chairs mair to yer mind than the flag stanes without, and ye winna need to wait lang—ye'll hear my lady jow the muckle siller bell whenever she's gotten a' the beams out o' her fellow Christians' e'en, and then ye can gang up the stair. I'd keep ye company myself, and be glad to do't, but I'm trysted wi' Neil the night to sup posset at his mither's, and ye ken what a tryst is, maybe Alice."

"Or maybe no," said Alice, smiling at the insinuation. "But, Eppie, what if the master or mistress of this place should come back and find me here?"

"It's a master—but he's aye late o' nights, and never comes hame till the ten o'clock drum hath sounded, and whiles not for whole days thegither. He's a

mighty grim auld chiel, a Whig preacher, I guess; there's walth o' them in the toun now that the sodger bodies is far awa'—mair's the pity! He aye glowers at me when I pass him wi' my passmented hood and blue kirtle, as if they had been his ain and I had lifted them. Nae need to fear for him. Gude even to ye, Alice dear, and try to get a bit mair red in yer bonnie face, ye're ower pale."

Therewith Eppie kissed her on both cheeks, and danced away in great spirits, being, as she said, on leave that evening, and anxious to make the most of her short liberty—such occasions were rare in the *régime* under which she lived.

Alice was not long in becoming a convert to the superior merit of the chair in which Eppie had installed her over the rough stone bench in the hall, and of the thick matting which was under her feet over the damp pavement without. Having nothing better to do, and finding that Lady Libberton's gossips were somewhat long in taking their leave, she began to look about her, and investigate the aspect of the apartment into which she had been unceremoniously introduced. It was decidedly funereal on the whole; very high in proportion to its size, and very dark, having only two small windows, as deeply set as those of a prison, and placed so high that Alice, when she tried to look out of them, could only just see that they opened into a square courtyard, of which other buildings formed the three other sides—edifices so massive and tall, piled tier upon tier, that it seemed astonishing how any blessed rays of sunshine could ever condescend to plunge into such a

dismal well, from which man had taken elaborate pleasure in excluding them. One little patch of clear pale blue was however within ken, and its reflection from the surrounding walls enabled Alice to perceive that the room was panelled with very dark wood, and that the gaunt, weird-looking chairs were covered with a material which, if not absolutely black, appeared so in that semi-obscurity. The immense chimney-mantel projected a great distance into the room; the recess which it formed on the farthest side from the window was shut in by doors, probably enclosing an alcove or closet-bed, while the other was occupied by a highly-carved wardrobe or cabinet, which towered up until its slender pinnacles were quite lost in the gloom of the ceiling. Except this and the seats there was no furniture, and indeed no traces of occupation, unless it were a slight disarrangement of the said chairs, of which three stood grouped in the window-bay, as if continuing on their own account the conversation in which the sitters had been engaged.

Nothing very enlivening. By a little twinge of feminine curiosity Alice bethought her of peeping into another apartment, the door leading into which opened opposite to the windows of the first. It looked out into the street, and was rather lighter than its neighbour, but in other respects quite as cheerful and elegant, possessing however in addition a table and some chimney-ornaments in the shape of a pair of horse-pistols and a sword.

Her inquiries ended, Alice began to grow rather impatient, and determined only to wait a short time

longer, when, if the "muckle siller bell" was still silent, she would run the risk of Lady Libberton's displeasure, and return to her lodging, not wishing to be alone in the streets after dark, although in the absence of the soldiers, which Eppie so much deplored, the thoroughfares had become in every way safer and more agreeable to traverse, especially at night. Meanwhile, as she was very tired, and had been suffering from violent headache increased by the unusual and oppressive mildness of the spring weather, she ensconced herself in the most comfortable of the wizard-like arm-chairs; and, what with fatigue, and the soothing effect of the twilight stillness in the sombre apartment, she had not sat there ten minutes before every idea which had passed through her mind that evening lost all distinct outline, and became jumbled together in a confusion which, little by little, as her slumber grew deeper, cleared away into a vision more distinct and more vivid than Alice had ever dreamed before.

She was walking with Flora in the haunts of her girlhood, a child no longer, but her own very self, conscious, even in sleep, of the transformation which had cast childish things far behind. Their careless steps had led them through the waving, sunny woods—how familiar the rich fragrance seemed to her!—down to a favourite spot on the banks of the Carrig Burn; and she remembered how Flora had once compared the liquid lustre of her handsome kinsman's eyes to the "brown, brown current" of its shady pools. As they stood together, Flora's arm round her waist, and her head on Flora's shoulder, idly gazing into the clear

profundity,—watching the trembling glimpses of deep blue sky which glanced through the overhanging trees, like a shy beauty half frightened to part her dark locks from her face and behold her own azure orbs in her mirror—lo! from the depths of the lovely waters a form seemed to arise—a head with stern, glazed, dead eyes that froze her blood, and livid lips that writhed, and gibbered, and mocked her. She shrieked, and shuddered, and hid her face, but, turn where she would, it threatened her—that “shape which shape had none”—now in the dim semblance of her father, with brow of awe and condemnation, now in the likeness of Norman, with words of shame and scorn, which echoed through her brain like the trump of an avenging angel. Then, suddenly, she knew not how, the figure beside her became that of Lord Dundee; and, all fear forgotten at once, she clung to him, and lay upon his breast in a rapture of love—a speechless, unutterable agony of happiness—such as is never vouchsafed to us but in dreams, lest it might make us forget heaven. Time—such time as mortal joys are measured by—seemed annihilated in the long, passionate kiss, which drew her very soul to his—the tremor of mortal terror swallowed up in the quiver which awoke every chilled pulse, as his long, perfumed hair swept over her cheek, as his breath stirred the light curls on her neck, and his strong arm held her in a clasp which seemed to challenge the whole world to part them, while he told her that he was free to love her now, and whispered in her entranced ear words which seemed echoes of Paradise. And she wept in his fond embrace, and

sobbed in the very extremity of her ecstasy, telling him how long and silently she had suffered for his dear sake; but, looking up to meet that smile which could make all sorrow precious, she saw his face change from its glow of ardour and beauty into the hideous image which haunted her; the eloquent lips became those of a corpse, the lustrous eyes sank from their sockets, the noble features faded to ghastly skin and bone, the detaining arms, in which she had nestled like a tender bird in its home, changed to the fleshless limbs of a skeleton, and stifled her with their spectral pressure. Sick, wild, desperate with horror, she strove to scream, to struggle forth into flight; but the air had grown cold and dank as in a charnel-vault, the sky black as midnight, a loud clap of thunder reverberated through the valley like the crack of doom, and Alice awoke, trembling and affrighted, to find herself alone in the empty room, with no soul by, whether friend or foe.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE LION AND THE MOUSE.

Mur. I am one, my liege,
Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
Have so incensed, that I am reckless what
I do, to spite the world.

* * * * *

Macb. Both of you
Know Banquo was your enemy.

Mur. True, my lord.

Macb. So he is mine; and in such bloody distance,
That every minute of his being thrusts
Against my near'st of life.

MACBETH.

ALICE awoke, as we said in our last chapter, to find her dream nothing but a dream, except in two particulars—the darkness, and the noise which had so opportunely roused her. Not a glimmer of daylight was left; the very window-spaces were hardly distinguishable from the walls; but she had no leisure to speculate upon how long she had been there, for the crash of the iron-plated and massive street-door was immediately followed by the incontrovertible sounds of two men's voices. Angry with herself for giving way to slumber, and, perhaps, a little with Eppie for admitting her where in truth she had no right to be, she sprang up with all her wits about her, and tried to make her exit by one door while the new comers were unlocking that of the front apartment. Unluckily, as she thought, the key refused to move,

it was rusty and stiff; so, as time pressed, she stole across the room, and, by an impulse which considering its results might be termed providential, threw herself behind the group of chairs in the window embrasure, reducing herself to the smallest possible compass, and, with great presence of mind, drawing her black muffler entirely over her head, face, and arms, so that their light colour should not strike the eye of any person entering.

She had hardly stilled herself, and *not* had a moment to reflect whether she had done a wise thing in thus concealing herself, and whether it might not have been a great deal better and easier to have faced the owner at once, and obtained immediate egress, when the sound of heavy feet resounded in the adjacent apartment, and the clank of a broadsword, which rattled sharply in its iron sheath as the wearer stumbled against some article of furniture.

"Blood and fury! Why do you decoy one into this wolf's den of yours to break one's neck?" ejaculated the individual in question; adding to the inquiry a by no means flattering adjuration.

His companion, whoever he was, made no reply, but appeared, from various noises, to be groping about for the means of striking a light. But, if *he* were unmoved by the speaker's coarse accents, not so was Alice—for she instantly, and without a shadow of doubt, remembered tones which had been too closely associated with the great epoch of her life not to be familiar for ever after. It was the voice of Drummond.

"Now heaven help and deliver me, for I am in the

lion's den," thought the terrified girl, pressing her cold wet palms more closely together.

"Curse you! Give us some light, I say! I hate being in the dark," grumbled the sullen ruffian, as the other still delayed.

"Thou hast lived long enough in it to have grown accustomed to it, methinks," was the answer, in the unmistakeable speech of a Cameronian preacher; and, with these words, a slender stream of light shone through the opening of the door of communication, ran along the floor, and rose half way to the ceiling; so that Alice now saw from where she knelt the two figures it rendered visible in the room beyond.

"He is not come, after all!" exclaimed Drummond, throwing himself into a chair, with his back to the frightened watcher.

"It seemeth not. He made no positive tryst, remember."

"No? What are we doing here, then?"

"Nay; did I not tell thee that the promise was on this wise—that if his errand prospered he would meet us here, but that if he were unseasonably delayed we must proceed to the very spot?"

"I forgot. And is he to be trusted—this new David who is to slay the champion of the persecuting Philistines?" asked the quondam Guardsman, with an ill-concealed sneer.

"Even as myself."

"Humph!" was the insolent articulation of Drummond. Then came a pause.

"Hark!" exclaimed the Cameronian — "what stirred?"

"Nothing—absurd!" said Drummond, glancing over his shoulder. "What should there be?"

"Nothing, like enough. But when thou hast lived long years an outlawed wanderer in dens and caves of the earth, in spots where each bank and scaur might shelter a foe, each tree a man of blood hungering and thirsting for the life of the Lord's chosen ones, as thou hast done thyself, thou wouldst be apt to use more prudence, I ween, even between four bare walls, which could scarce conceal a lurking enemy."

Thereupon the Cameronian took up the lamp, and advanced into the room where Alice was. The girl closed her lips to retain her gasping breath; she expected no less than that he should walk straight to her hiding-place and drag her from it; she counted every infinitesimal point of time which delayed the discovery, and each seemed to be the last. But he stopped in the middle of the apartment, and, lifting the lamp, turned gradually round to cast its light in all directions—went a step or two towards the bed-closet already mentioned—opened it and looked in—paused, again listened acutely with his head peering forwards and his hand behind his ear, in the attitude of a man accustomed to the dangers and suspicions of his habitual existence—then, apparently satisfied, locked and double-locked the door which Alice had been unable to unfasten, and went back to his associate.

"All is well," he said, sitting down, and placing the lamp upon the table, "none can now enter in upon us unobserved."

Alice, who had sunk down from sheer nervous

weakness easy to conceive, with infinite precaution raised herself again, and found that she could see a good deal of what was going on, and hear every syllable as plainly as if she had been beside the actors, except when, as sometimes happened, a noise in the street deadened the sounds within.

For a considerable time—she had no means of judging how long—there was nothing to see or to hear. The Cameronian had applied himself to the study of a small book which he produced from his pocket—Drummond, whom Alice now recognised by sight as well as by ear, was as noisy and restless as his companion was quiet, walking round and round the room like a bear in its cell, his long sword and iron-heeled boots resounding loudly in the half-empty space—flinging himself down every five minutes on his seat, and grating it roughly backwards as he did so—muttering to himself curses which very often he repeated aloud, and beating the devil's tattoo with hand and foot, partly it would seem from inability to compose himself, partly to attract the attention of the reader, who did not however allow himself to be thus disturbed.

“Heatherfield!” he began at last, “what do you think of my manœuvre for obtaining the best and latest intelligence respecting my lord viscount's movements,—his outgoings and incomings, his plans and route for the evening? Did I not tell you I would have it all out of Muir, like the cork from a flask of Burgundy? It is not in vain that I know the peccadilloes of my old comrades, and can worm out what I want from under a drunken man's belt as

keenly as e'er a lawyer in auld Reekie. I plied him so generously that he will snore like a pig in his sty until this time to-morrow, and hang me if I don't take some credit to myself for keeping the body in subjection, as you call it, so far as to have one or two of my senses clear. I thought it was all up with me, half a stoup more would have finished me, when my *camarado* rolled over, and I gave him a kick to celebrate my victory—ha, ha! it was more than you could have carried, old lantern-jaws!"

"Thy triumph well becomes thee," replied the harsh but clear and sonorous tones of the Cameronian; "to pander to a fellow-creature's vices for thine own ends is worthy of the school in which thou wert reared, and the sins in which thou hast wallowed, and lovest still to enjoy, albeit thou hast joined thyself for a time to children of the Covenant."

"Hold your cursed cant, with a murrain on you!" cried Drummond, who was as usual in that particular stage of intoxication which inflames all the evil passions while leaving the faculties tolerably alert. "You lying old gallows-snipe! that I could have hanged fifty times over in the good times when we rode booted and spurred over your craven necks, do you come with your sanctified snuffle to brand me as a child of the devil, an apostate bound for perdition, when we are both here with the same hope and for the same godly purpose? You want to kill him because he has injured you—I intend to have his life because he insulted me—do you understand plain English, most elect brother? which of us is the better man, eh?"

In his exasperation, the half-drunken bravo shook his clenched fist in the face of the Whig, with an oath which made poor Alice feel as if the earth must open to engulf him.

“Why do the heathen so furiously rage?” was the unmoved answer of Heatherfield. “Behold, they are in the hand of the Lord to do as seemeth him good, ordained as instruments of vengeance against the persecutors, and sharp arrows in the side of the ungodly—as it is written so shall it come to pass. Thou, George Drummond, who hast thy portion with the uncircumcised in heart and lips, art become as Jehu the son of Nimshi, and as the man Hazael, King of Syria, to execute wrath upon the chief enemy of God—when thy task is done, and the cup of thine iniquities full, shall he not break thee in pieces like a potter’s vessel?”

His worthy coadjutor in the scheme of violence to which all this excited recrimination evidently alluded, uttered a loud brutal laugh and a jest more brutal still.

“I fight for no lord or master, earthly or heavenly,” he sneered, “but for mine own hand; and, by —! if this chance fail me through any fault of yours or yonder whey-faced loon, I will turn my weapon—yea brother, even this carnal weapon of which thou didst once taste the virtue and efficacy upon thine own skull—against the lambs of the Covenant, who for their own edifying purposes have let a wolf like myself into the true fold, without even the sheep’s clothing.”

“Miserable man! are thine eyes so blinded that thou can’st behold nothing but thine own fleshly ven-

geance in the great deed of judgment and justice which this night will bring forth? Art thou still so utterly in the gall of bitterness and the very bonds of iniquity?"

"The gall of bitterness!" almost shouted Drummond, starting to his feet in sudden fury—"and what can such poor hunted curs as you and your like, refuse only fit for a gentleman to wipe the soles of his shoes upon, know of the gall of bitterness which makes me a devil? Slaves and bondmen! I know you for good haters, or we never should have been chained together as we are, but your worst malignity is oil and honey to mine. Why, man! I would sell my soul, if I believed I had one, to compass the revenge I want!"

"I have turned my hand against the hand of John Grahame because it hath been very heavy upon the people of the Lord, and I have a burden against him," replied the enthusiast, with a calmness quite astonishing, and which could only have arisen from some imperative necessity which forbade him to risk alienating his rude yokefellow in the proposed assassination of Lord Dundee, or from a pride which could not be assailed by such ferocious insolence.

"Bah!" said Drummond, "and you will satisfy your *burden* (whatever that may mean) by simply, innocently slaying him with so many rapier-wounds and so many pistol-shots? a pitiful deed, coming after such big, swelling words!"

"He will die the death of a dog—his carcass shall be as dung on the earth—his dwelling is with the wicked and the rich in his death, and he shall go to his

appointed place," said Heatherfield, with an intensity of fierce joy, which, if less outwardly cynical than that of Drummond, was to Alice, shivering and cold with dismay, to the full as dreadful and blasphemous.

"And *that* is the extent of your conception of revenge!" sneered Drummond again. "I had done you Whigs the honour of believing that you could hit out a braver scheme, if only to gloat over in fancy. Now I, my pious brother, who am, alas! but a poor sinner, and a Babel's brat—who have never served my apprenticeship under the Christian discipline and savoury admonitions of the apostles and martyrs whose heads perfume the air of this good town, *I* had conceived the matter with an inspiration worthy of their palmiest days."

"What can thy ribald scoffs, thy taking in vain of the glorious names of those holy men, concern me?" replied Heatherfield, sternly. "How often am I to tell thee that between us there is no bond; and that although it hath been the Lord's pleasure that in the matter of this man, even Claverhouse, we should be fellow-servants to bring about that which is decreed, my soul abhors the seat of the scorner, and hath no delight in his ways. Thine understanding is waxed gross, and the prince of this world hath made thee his willing slave, to do what is pleasing to thine own unregenerate heart, while thou dost sacrifice to thy carnal lusts—to thy rancour for a so-called stain upon thy honour—to the wrath of man which worketh not righteousness—wielding the sword of Heaven to right the wrongs of earth. Dost thou hope that such ser-

vice will not stink in the nostrils of the Lord of Sabbath ? ”

“ Not I ! ” retorted Drummond, “ and, if it do, what is that to me ? But, if you would fain know *how* George Drummond can hate, I tell you that if every misery Claverhouse ever inflicted on the cropped pates of you and your rascal brood could be heaped upon his head, it would fail to content me. I would have him, haughty as he is, shamed until the vilest camp-follower might point the finger at his degradation ; I would see the beauty by which he sets such store tortured out of human shape—(aha ! how the boots would crush his shapely limbs, and the lighted matches and grinding thumb-screws feed on his dainty hands !)—I would see him ride in the hangman’s cart, and swing from the hangman’s gibbet—I could die happy if I were to behold the axe sever limb from limb, and the gory head set on the Netherbow to be the meal of carrion crows ! Do *you* know what it is to hate like this ?—Pshaw ! your blood is woman’s milk ! ”

Heatherfield’s cold grey eyes, bright and keen as steel, were riveted on the coarse bloated face and dull eyes of the speaker, which only cleared into intelligence during these horrible sallies to sink again into their stupified animal heaviness, on which habits of the lowest dissipation and innate brutality had set a now ineffaceable stamp. Bad as he was, when we first introduced him, sorely against our will, to the reader, he was ten-fold more irreclaimably abased, now that disgrace had made him more reckless, more desperate, and more profligate than ever.

The Cameronian probably had his reasons for not entering upon any controversy respecting the zeal of his sect, for all conversation ceased, and Alice, kneeling still in the cramped, uneasy posture she had been obliged to adopt at first, and had not afterwards dared to modify by a line, racked her brain to discover from certain sentences of the above violent and unconnected discourse the direct thread of probability as to time, place, and numbers, which would enable her to frustrate the project of the assassins. Her chief dread was lest they might depart on their bloodthirsty work, leaving her imprisoned there, and the consideration of this chance (no such unlikely one,) so distracted her, that she even debated in her own mind the possibility of making her escape then and there. But this was too forlorn a hope to be entertained beyond one moment of uncalculating anguish—she could not have risen from her place—have trod a step—much less have unlocked the doubly-fastened door, without being detected by the cat-like vigilance of Heatherfield, whose presence, while it offered her some protection against the danger of personal outrage from Drummond, was no guarantee against that of a detention which would be fatal to her hope of rescuing Lord Dundee from the imminent peril in which he stood. How was this to be accomplished? Question after question darted across her mind, all equally insoluble, except the too positive fact that the murder was planned for that night; but the hour, the accomplices, the chances of defence, the short interval left for succour—all their designs, upon which hers must depend, were yet unexpressed, or had

been so indistinctly hinted at, that error in one single word might ruin all, and, instead of snatching their victim from the jaws of destruction, plunge him into the snare. She could only resort to her customary source of aid, and endeavour by mental prayer both to obtain strength to act and arm herself with patience to endure, adding to both supplications a thanksgiving that *she* had been chosen to protect him at any cost to herself. This was one ray of pure exquisite felicity in the dense obscurity through which loomed such myriad phantom forms of horror and danger.

If the reader here feel called upon to inquire into the extraordinary alliance between Heatherfield and his associate in crime, we reply that the circumstance alone is all we can vouch for; the truth of a fact in the history of the human heart being very often in an inverse ratio to its apparent verisimilitude. It would not be easy to say which hated the other most sincerely, or despised most thoroughly the man to whom the "bonds of iniquity" had, for the time being, so intimately united him; yet, in that hatred of each other, and of the common object of their wrath, differences existed which should not in justice be overlooked. There was a certain grandeur in the calm, inhuman impassiveness of the Cameronian, who so evidently regarded himself as an agent of Heaven; and this belief in a divinely-authorized mission, absorbing, at least to all outward seeming, the mere personal detestation of man for his fellow, rendered yet more revolting the savage cruelty of almost physical abhorrence expressed by Drummond—the tiger

ferocity which finds its most delicious pastime in the agonies of a victim, and would, if permitted, add the lowest ignominy to suffering. Perverted as both undoubtedly were, the perversion of the fanatic was that of religion, Drummond's that of unmitigated depravation. If the former were in reality more dangerously pernicious, the latter was infinitely more repulsive.

"Give me some brandy," said Drummond, after a long interval, and so peremptorily, that Alice started in spite of all her self-command.

As Heatherfield did not seem in any hurry to conform to this request, or rather order, the soldier reiterated it still more roughly.

"Art deaf, old crop-ear? where's thy cellar?"

"I am not thy servant, nor thy purveyor," he answered coolly. "Thou hast already debased thyself to the level of the brute beasts,—if thou wouldst sink lower still, the better to tear and rend thy prey, provide thyself; I will not stir to tempt thee."

"There never was a Whig seen where liquor was not near," answered Drummond, with a noisy laugh, "and I am not such an unfledged chicken as to be ignorant of how to find it. I learned the art of ransacking a store years ago in my raids among the brethren of Clydesdale; your saint is ever a true believer in the grace of strong waters."

He made good his words by instituting an immediate search amongst the contents of a closet, or almry, as it was called, tossing them out and aside with perfect unscrupulousness, until he discovered a flask

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containing a small quantity of the stimulant which excess of every description had long rendered more indispensable than daily food. He drained off a considerable share of the fiery potion, without the ceremony of cup or horn; and, with an imprecation upon the paucity of a draught sufficient to have intoxicated an abstemious man, placed the flask within reach of a subsequent application, and resumed his seat.

Whether the dram unloosed his tongue afresh, or the excessive quiet irritated nerves unstrung by a perpetual whirl of riot and debauchery, he almost instantly after took up the interrupted conversation.

"Cleland does not put himself inconveniently forward on this occasion; he has been prodigiously zealous in bringing us up to the charge, and now retreats, like a prudent general, to the extreme rear, and makes him ready, not to the battle, but to flight, in case the Philistines should molest the slayers of their champion. *Mort Dieu!* he is welcome to his post. I would not abandon my share in the business for the wealth of Spain and the Indies!"

"Natheless it is well that the man Muir suffered himself to be overcome, for this our adversary is such a sword-player as would have made equal numbers the worst imprudence, and his servant an Amalekite, hardened to war from his youth upward."

"No, the younger brother is a soldier, not the elder; Pate is a sturdy knave, but past his prime, and never saw service," answered Drummond. "Dundee himself would keep any two ordinary swordsmen in play on a fair field; but night, the surprise, and three pair

of pistols, not to speak of the advantages of position, will show a balance in our favour, such as he will find to his cost that I shall not be slack to use as a new way to pay my old debts; and, if steel break, and lead fail, I will *strangle* him!" he concluded, with a horrible cold-blooded execration, stretching out his brawny arms, and hands clenched and trembling with rage.

"The youth tarrieth long," said Heatherfield, "what misadventure can have delayed him?"

"Perchance he hath been decoyed into a pitfall of the Moabites, and hath offered us as a sacrifice to propitiate the heathen," said Drummond, who seemed to take a delight in mimicking the Scripture phraseology, which, impressive and solemn on the lips of men who lived and died by their interpretation of its statutes, however contrary to its whole spirit that interpretation might be, was, on those of the scoffer and profligate, a shocking buffoonery.

"No, he is both wary and experienced; and, had any untoward event discovered our designs to the enemy, he would suffer himself to be torn in pieces rather than betray us."

"Verily?" said Drummond ironically. "I am not blessed with so much faith. I should have fancied, being yet in unbelief, that a man would do much for life, I do not mean a *gentleman*, I do you to wit."

"I know not what such a distinction may signify, nor by what vows they who have their portion in this life may fetter their souls and those of their fellows in sin.

Such bonds would be snapped as links of tow by the fires which have purged the sanctuary, I trow; but he who serveth the Lord and regardeth him only will not fear the face of man, nor heed what he can do unto him. I would answer with my head for the fidelity of the youth."

"Well, that's lucky!" answered Drummond in the same scornful tone. "What of the clock? How long shall we have to shiver in this dog-kennel?"

"I cannot tell yet. Hark! the half-hour is chiming." And with his very words came the musical, sonorous chime of the Cowgate church.

"The time hath expired," said Heatherfield, as the clangour of the bell died away: "it is now our part to seek him, as he desired. Yet one ten minutes longer we will wait, lest he should have been let by some unforeseen mishap, and, seeking us here and not finding us, the matter fall to the ground."

"As you please," replied Drummond sullenly, and for the space indicated they sat in moody silence, while Alice's heart throbbed with such precipitation at the prospect of release, and the dread of detection, that she was obliged to press both her hands on her bosom lest her choking breath should be heard in the undisturbed hush which succeeded the noisy altercation of her unconscious jailors.

When the ten minutes had elapsed as nearly as could be guessed, Heatherfield rose, took down his pistols from the chimneypiece, examined and loaded them with minute accuracy, exchanged his coarse black doublet for one of thicker and stronger texture,

and placed the weapons in his belt; Drummond looking on all the while with unrepressed impatience.

When the Cameronian was equipped, he extinguished the light, and the confederates groped their way towards the door.

“Halt there, comrade, if you please!” said Drummond, I remember me of a small remainder of that excellent creature comfort called brandy left hereabouts, which I will by no account be ungracious enough to abandon. You will, ten to one, never come back to enjoy its virtues, and your executors will not miss it.”

He contrived to feel for the flask, and swallowed the few drops left from his previous liberal attacks on its contents, and, thus fortified for the operations of the night, the two worthies departed as they had come, Heatherfield taking the precaution of locking the outer room door and pocketing the key.

Alice waited until every chance of their re-appearance was over before she ventured to rise from the forced and painful attitude which had by this time become almost unbearable. But when she had done so, she could hardly stand—shivering with fear, her knees failing her, her head giddy, the drops of perspiration starting so thickly on her brow that her very hair was moist. In presence of a catastrophe so fearful as that which one hour more might bring about, how miserably feeble she felt!

Not in purpose, or in will—not in her might of love—Heaven knows not in that! for, could her life have ransomed his, it would have been already laid down—

ay, a hundred times; had she seen the swords of the murderers at his breast they would surely have only reached it through her own—but here neither love, devotion, nor courage could bear fruit unless supported by that ready presence of mind which for once had forsaken her in time of need. In her fond day-dreams she had again and again rehearsed some such conjuncture, in which she, the humble, perhaps forgotten, friend, was to gnaw the meshes which entangled the noble king of the forest—now he lay enveloped in them, betrayed as it seemed by one who owed him fidelity, and she knew not on which side to turn to countermine this infernal plot.

All at once, as if a new flood of strength had revived her, she sprang forward from her hidingplace where she had leant—faint and trembling—against the side of the window, as she first rose.

“He is saved! I have it! oh, fool that I was to forget!”

She had indeed utterly forgotten a few words dropped by the lad Jock respecting the conclave which he described as being held at the King’s Head—and this precious grain of clear certainty, winnowed from the heap of rubbish which had chafed her, became instantly the germ of a scheme which comprehended the plan of the assassins and fixed her own.—Lord Dundee was attending a meeting of Jacobite gentlemen at the tavern; intelligence of this had been transmitted to Heatherfield and his accomplices, either by the viscount’s servant, or some person in whom confidence had been reposed; his movements would be dogged,

and during his return home, which would most likely take place at a very late hour, the assassins would find their long-sought opportunity of revenge.

She almost cried aloud as the frightful scene which this last thought evoked painted itself in the darkness—the bloody, mangled, disfigured corpse of him whom she had last seen in his pride of strength and manhood, trodden down in the mire of the streets, outraged by the ruffian hands of Drummond. But she stifled the weak, womanly pang and flew to the door, to make her way out and put into effect the first step of the plan which had sprung ready and complete from her brain. Oh, misfortune! the lock refused to move; and all her most violent efforts seemed only to fix it more obdurately in one position. In a perfect paroxysm of despair she put forth all her strength—it was very little; the door continued as firmly closed as if it had formed part of a granite rock.

She dropped on her knees and threw up her arms like one supplicating for life.

“Oh, my God! have mercy upon me!” was all she could say.

Then with redoubled energy she applied herself to her task, until at last by one fortunate, unintentional movement the crooked ill-fitting key slipped into its proper place, one grating turn, another final struggle, and Alice was free.

Her slender fingers were dreadfully bruised and strained, but of that she thought not nor cared to think: she felt her way along the dark passage, drew the heavy bolts of the immense street door, and, leav-

ing it open behind her, stood, wild with eager haste, in the fresh night air, which blew with delicious coolness on her burning cheeks and injured hands. On she sped, afraid to run from a morbid dread of attracting suspicion, but darting over the rough, treacherous pavement, traversing street, wynd, and archway with an unerring certainty which she probably could not have exercised, even in broad day, without some such impulse to guide her. She reached the head of the close—in a few minutes more the goal would be attained, the letter which was to be the bearer of her saving message written, and Alice on her way again. One worthy gossip, a lodger in the same house, was lounging with crossed arms and slipshod feet over the wooden outside stair—but she was far too much occupied with the edifying dissection of a neighbour's most private concerns, which she was carrying on with a fellow cummer at the third-story window opposite, to notice Alice's figure as she glided in at the unclosed door (a sure sign of Janet's absence). The girl flew up the interminable staircase—a thin red line of light was glowing along the narrow corridor into which her room opened.

“Strange!” she thought, and, pushing the door which she had left fast shut, saw, with what a sinking of the heart no words can describe, her brother Norman!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE LETTER.

Is this a brother? why then let me be
Divorced from kindred, blood, and brotherhood—
Nature has lied in him.

HE was sitting by the fireside, on which three or four logs of wood had been thrown, reading by the light which they afforded, and with the expression of obstinacy which characterized every line in his person, so intensified by some peculiarity of look and posture, that Alice could not doubt that for some purpose of his own he was there to see her. And when he turned quickly round with his usual abrupt address, and eyed her narrowly with his usual lynx-eyed keenness, she could not deceive herself as to the fact, that under that glance she was, to all intents and purposes of her night's mission, as truly helpless as if she had still been immured in the grim dungeon-like place where she had gained the fearful secret which burdened her spirit, and which she shrunk from the idea that her brother's insatiable suspicion should descry in the sudden pallor which overspread her face, as the blood retreated to her heart and the gripe of despair seized her for the second time. Oh, to fail thus at the eleventh hour, when she thought all obstacles past!—to know that, while he watched her, the first symptom of displeasure, the first

attempt at secrecy, would be ruin to whatever hope might still be left!—to feel that bold advance or timely retreat were both equally impossible!

“Whence come you, Alice, at this late hour?” he asked turning his head towards his sister, who did not seem able to move or speak, and could not answer.

“Where have you been?” he repeated very decidedly.

“I know not—that is to say—to Libberton—and elsewhere,” she murmured unconnectedly; and, as he still kept his eyes bent on her, she summoned all her self-possession and added bitterly,

“I hadna thought to see *you* here; it is seldom Norman Scott can find his way to the house where his motherless sister dwells.”

“I am here now, nevertheless, as you perceive,” he replied drily, and therewith resumed his studies—of whatever description they might be—with an air of deliberation which left no loophole of self-deception as to his intention of staying as long as ever he found it convenient.

Driven far beyond her natural and acquired awe of Norman’s tyranny, by the remembrance of Lord Dundee’s frightful peril, and the certainty that no creature but herself possessed the power of saving him, Alice was on the point of hurrying from the room—when Norman stood up, exclaiming angrily,

“Again, Alice? If you have any *creditable* necessity which can take you forth at such a time of night, I will accompany you myself; but I fear the reverse.”

She obeyed without the slightest remonstrance, and

dropped into a seat near the corner of the fire-place—stunned.

“Stay here,” continued Norman; “whatever society you may choose in preference to mine at another time, you must endure it now. I have many questions to ask you; and first of all respecting our mother.”

At any more propitious moment that mother's dear name would have been a sound of most sweet and welcome sadness—at any other time Alice would have spoken with sober gladness and chastened grief of sufferings meekly endured, of death in its most painful garb so resignedly met—but now she could not bear it, and the tears which scarcely fell from her fevered lids, dried up as they rose by the fire within, were no facile shower, leaving a pensive joy behind, but slow, scalding drops, wrung from her unaccustomed eyes by the intolerable rack of suspense. She did not rightly hear her own voice, she could scarcely collect her distracted thoughts to answer his, for the echoing strokes of the old wooden clock on the wall behind her beat on her brain as if every swing of the pendulum were a death-knell, ringing out the fate of the hunted and doomed man her soul loved—each half-hour melting away like a second, each second extending itself into a century of nightmare oppression. Surely, if there were any truth in the boasted invincibility of the human will, Norman would long since have departed, for every energy of her being, the whole intensity of volition of which she was capable, had centred on one point—to thrust, to urge, to drive him from her. The irritation of listening and speaking grew at last so

cruel that it overcame even her gentleness; could such a thing have been possible, Alice would have hated him then.

"I *cannot* bear it, Norman; I will tell you nothing more of sorrows which you were too callous to share, and which, if you had been a son to the mother that bore you, you would have kenned as I ken them, from my own too bitter knowledge. Ask me no more, speak to me no more, let me be—I am weary and sick unto death, of myself, of you, of everything ——"

She shrunk further still into her dark corner, and, with compressed lips and fingers knit until the nails cut through the soft flesh, numbered the grains of sand as they ran out from the last hour which could avail her. He could almost have touched her by stretching out his arm, yet between them rose an adamantine rampart built up of her love and of his hate, which had been slowly growing for many a year, and could never be broken through now.

Just as the last weak thread which held the straining anchor of hope was giving way, to leave Alice tossed on a sea of desperation that might have drifted her, who knows whither?—Norman quitted his seat, and came close to her.

"Alice, have you money?"

"Money? do you need it?" she said.

"I do—greatly, and for the moment have no means of procuring it. The business which has brought me to Edinburgh will be terminated within a very short time, and I shall be obliged to leave."

"Soon?" she asked greedily.

"To-night, I believe—it does not depend entirely upon myself."

She had gone the instant he addressed her to the old cabinet where she kept her little treasure, and offered him the purse containing Lady Glencarrig's gift.

"Take this, and welcome."

"What does it contain, Alice?"

"Gold, more than I need; I have no use for it, and shall never touch it."

It seemed a strange circumstance to her, even in the bewilderment of her forlorn hope, amidst this rekindling of the spark in the half-dead ashes, that her brother, jealous to excess, authoritative and interfering in the merest trifles, and prone to put the very worst construction on the most innocent actions of everyday occurrence—one, in short, who reversed on all possible occasions the divine precept of thinking no evil—should accept from her what could not be other than a considerable sum without making the most insignificant inquiry as to its origin; but so it was; he simply weighed the purse in his hand, and bestowed it in a safe place, saying carelessly, as a matter of course,

"I will repay you."

"No, no, it was given to me, and I will give it to you," said Alice hastily, retreating again to her former nook; she dared not meet his eye. Norman took up his bonnet and old grey cloak, as if, now that the object of his visit was attained, he had no other inducement to stay. Perhaps he had not calculated upon doing so with such facility; but, if Alice had owned

the riches of Golconda and Peru, she would have poured them out at his feet to purchase his absence, had it lasted but ten minutes.

* * * * *

Conscience is said to make cowards of us all, and this axiom may perhaps account for the fact that Master Jock Maclean, as he stole homewards somewhere about a quarter of an hour before the ten o'clock drum sounded, experienced a notable diminution in his usual devil-may-care indifference to temporal or spiritual foes. That young gentleman (believed by his judicious parent to be enjoying in his little attic bed the sleep popularly assigned to innocence as its exclusive privilege) was at this precise moment of the night sneaking back from a forbidden party of pleasure in forbidden company, and anxiously enumerating the successive stages of his ascent to the aforesaid place of repose at which there was a chance of his being entrapped and submitted incontinently to corporeal chastisement, as absent without leave. The valuable monitor to which we have alluded spoke pretty loudly in the prodigal's breast; and, by raising ideas of condign punishment hovering over him in some shape or another, gave additional terrors to the clutch, short, sharp, and sudden, which arrested his cautious tread on the threshold of the still open door of his mother's hospitable establishment, and was instantly followed by a corresponding seizure of the other shoulder.

Jock's Nemesis had indeed trodden on the heels of his offence. Here was sharp practice! Dame Christie's was of that description in which the culprit

is hung first and tried afterwards, commonly called Jeddart justice, and Jock knew it.

"Eh! oh! chow! oh, mammy!" pleaded the crest-fallen culprit; "I'll never do't again. It was a' the faut o' Syme Brand and Tam Leckie that beguiled me; ye maun lay the wyte on them ——"

And Jock ignominiously slid down on to his knees, for, unable to see an inch before him in the gloomy entry, he very naturally concluded that his captor was one in authority, who, apprised of his nocturnal jaunts, had lain in ambush to convict him *in flagrante delicto*.

"Whisht ye, Jock!" and a soft little hand covered his mouth; "hush! it is I, Alice."

Jock scrambled up and took hold of her arm. They could not see each other, for the corridor had no lamp, and the thing presented itself in such a ludicrous point of view to the boy's mind, always on the look out for diversion, that he was obliged to stifle a laugh.

"Have ye been out barnsbreaking too, Alice?" he whispered.

"Jock, dear Jock! you must do something for me. I have been lurking here outby to see you, or some one who could tell you how much I longed to speak with you. I dare not trust your mother, or your brother. You must serve me to-night, and prevent a dreadful deed."

The opening and shutting of a door and the scuffling of feet in a distant part of the house made the girl start violently. Jock slunk very close, closer than quite becomed his manhood; much inclined, if the truth must out, to hide behind her; but no one

appeared, and they remained undisturbed. She bent to whisper in his ear, still keeping him fast with both hands.

"Is the meeting broken up? say, quick!"

"Na," replied Jock, in the same key; but, if it had been open daylight, his countenance would have been a study in its blank amazement and gaping curiosity.

"Is Lord Dundee still here?"

"I canna say, not having seen."

Alice almost groaned.

"But you know him well, do you not?"

"Ay, certes; mair by token he gied me a bonnie lily-white English shilling twa days syne, nae farther, for haudin' his grand grey charger while he spake wi' my Lord Dunbarton doun yonder at Bristo Port. I winna say either that it wasna weel earned, for a mair unchancy, camstairy beast never was bitted—but I was mair than even wi' him. The mickle black Cloutie had just gotten intill *him*, if he hasna his master."

"Have done, Jock, for haven's sake, with all this folly! There is murder in the air to-night; is this a time for jests? Go to him, give him this letter; but, as you love me, let them kill you sooner than confess how you came by it. If you do this safely and well, ask of me what you will, it shall be yours."

"I'll ask ye naething, not I," replied Jock chivalrously, "though it clean dumbfounders my sma' wits to guess what new gate o' things is this, that ye suld be sendin' letters to my Lord Dundee, and havcrin'

like a dementit lassie anent murders to be dune. Is the wee letter yer ain writing, Elsie? and wha telled ye? and wha's to be killed? is it Dundee himsel' or ony o' the other gentles yonder?"

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Alice, terrified at his loud, random talk. "It is as much almost as your life or mine is worth that any one should hear you."

"Hout, tout!" returned the boy; "I hae kenned and keepit mair secrets than yersel', Madam Alice; fear ye na me. I gie ye my Bible aith that yer letter shall be delivered, and that wi' a' diligence; but then I maunna bide here, Elsie, or the mither will harle me awa' by lug and horn like the dyvour loons that canna pay what thy're awing, and gets theirsels lodged for sma' fee in the Tolbooth. If I'm confiscate, ye see, the bit letter ——"

"Cannot ye carry it now, and come back to tell me?" pleaded Alice nervously.

"Na, na, woman. Can I whisk through an aik door three inches thick, fast steckit wi' bolt and bar, think ye? or drap down by the lum like a ghaist or an angel? I'm no muckle like them, I trow. I'll hide and spy hereabout, and when they come forth I'll take my best occasion o' speakin' wi' Dundee; and, by the gude Saint Andro! the mither may skelp me if she will; it's my concern, and I'd take a year's skelping and waur for love o' you, Elsie."

"I will reward you, and Heaven will surely bless you for your kindness, dear boy; but oh, Jock, I have trusted you—be prudent."

"I'll be onything ye please, Elsie, if ye will but

kiss me, dearie; and, if I maun die to do your will, it shallna fail."

Alice bent her head as this odd boy threw his arms round her neck, and availed himself of the tacit permission.

"Dear Elsie!" he exclaimed, "are ye greetin' yer cheeks is wet."

"Never mind, Jock, I'm only tired and ill, I think. But you will not let him be murdered so cruelly at dead of night?"

"My Lord Dundee? I love him, Elsie. He's the noblest gentleman the sun ever shone upon, and when I'm a man I'll ride with him to the world's end. I'll be nae hum-drum hosteller like Neil, to beck and bow, and come and gang at the first comer's bidding; but a braw trooper lad, like the gay young lairds that used to play at shovel-board and drink their claret in our house before the black-nebs and blue-bonnets cocked their hats agee, and set theirsels up for gentlemen, the base knaves! Will ye be my jo, then, Alice?"

"You will never ride with him if you miss to warn him now, Jock," said Alice, who was regaining some composure with the apparent certainty that, after all her sickening anxieties, she was not too late.

"Then maist surely he shall *not* die," replied the boy, drawing himself up with a firmness beyond his years. "Here will I abide till I ha' pitten the letter intill his ain loof; and the deil and his imps stow the lugs out o' my head if I and you, Elsie, canna cheat the Whig bodies, for I guess it 'll be some black hell-kail o' their brewin', eh?"

Alice was silent; she felt that, her errand once done, and, as far as human prevision could extend, satisfactorily done, this was no place for her, especially at such an hour; yet her feet clung to the ground over which he must have trod—she could not tear herself from the walls which sheltered him—she could not chase away the importunate idea that her remaining near him would bring security and her removal give freer scope to the dangers from which she sought to protect him. The fragile frame, which had been severely tasked by these exciting scenes, now began to crave imperiously a rest which the too sensitive brain refused to grant; and, although she loathed the very thought of the dreary night-hours to be spent alone with the tormenting creations of her overwrought imagination, in the dumb anguish of expectancy—the gnawing weariness of ignorance, when the soul would fain divorce itself from its tyrant matter to pursue its own unfettered track—yet there she *could* not stay.

“How will I live until to-morrow?” was her inward exclamation, as she stood at the door and glanced up to the heavens, over which a struggling tinge of wan grey told that the orb of night had risen behind the thin veil of storm-vapour and was striving to pierce it. The child, who still held her listless hand, saw the expression which accompanied this ejaculation—the wild, uplifted eye—he was half scared.

“Alice, dearie, ye hae been a’maist fleyed to death; ye maun gang hame, or ye’ll fall sick like yer mither. See now, yer hand burns mine, and yer cheeks forby;

but ye are white as a ghaist, and ye shake like a willow wand. Gang hame, dearie, and sleep."

"I'll never sleep again, I think," murmured poor Alice, laying her hand on the brow, where each irregular pulsation might have been counted as it sent up its tribute of pain. "Go, Jock, and remember that if you betray him and me you will be doubly a murderer yourself."

Putting something into the lad's fingers, she vanished from his gaze so swiftly and noiselessly that the darkness closed round her as the waves over a sinking swimmer, leaving no more trace behind.

Jock, now alone, walked out into the street to gain a glimmer of the fast-increasing moonlight, and discover the value of her parting gift.

"Gowd!" he muttered, as the shining coin displayed itself to his wide open eyes. "Gowd, as I live! and English money forbye! She's the vera queen o' the fairies, I ween, to hae siller in sic plenty! But I winna keep it, it wad be takin' reward for a man's soul—gettin' blood-money; sae bide ye still there—until yer bonnie mistress comes again," continued this odd compound of good and mischief, "it's no for that I'll give yer letter to Claver'sc, Alice."

He hid the little piece of precious metal in a pocket of his old green cloth doublet, and looked about for a convenient nook in which to watch unmolested for the exit of Lord Dundee. Within the house this was not to be found. It was remarkable that even their hurried conversation, mere shreds and scraps of unconnected talk, had not been interrupted half a dozen times,

either by the passage of departing guests, or by the wrathful apparition of Dame Christie, who in her zeal for the maintenance of order due, and anxiety respecting the vagaries of her truant son, exercised in general so vigorous a police in the establishment as to have acquired a reputation for omniscience and ubiquity. The bare, smooth sides of the low, though spacious entry, afforded no aperture for concealment; it had neither recess nor closet; on the right-hand side a short passage and two or three steps led to the great oak parlour usually appropriated to the use of the higher class of frequenters; the room devoted to the reception of less aristocratic pleasure-seekers was on the left, and luckily (for Jock) had a separate communication with the kitchens and cellars. All this duly weighed, Master Jock strolled out afresh, and after mature reflection selected as his post a deep niche in the wall, about six feet from the ground, of which one existed on either side of the roughly-carved, low-browed door; for the house had been a convent in days of yore, and two guardian effigies of canonized abbots had been enshrined there, in the full pomp of mitre, crozier, and ecclesiastical array, until convents, monks, and saints in their sculptured semblances had been "dung down" and swept away by the Reformation.

The niche was not difficult to reach by means of the window-sill and some rough projections of the wall, and in it Jock Maclean took up his position—a leal and willing ambassador, half for the admiration which, boy-like, he nourished towards the haughty, brilliant soldier—half for the sake of sweet Alice Scott, with

whose charms and graces he was as desperately in love as young gentlemen of his mature age are often known to be. The station he had chosen, however perfect as a look-out, was not without its drawbacks, which threatened to increase, if, as the night wore on, the wind were to lull, and permit the heavy clouds to descend in rain; but Jock felt a magnificent contempt for elemental inclemencies, and snugly hidden, safe from prying eyes, in the black shades of the deep recess, regarded himself as little short of a Paladin, dispatched upon an errand of "derring do" by the high behest of the lady of his heart—enjoying at once the novelty of his employment, and the rather chimerical expectation of distinguishing himself by his zeal in the eyes of Viscount Dundee, to whom he did homage in his soul as his future general and leader.

CHAPTER XL.

THE COUNCIL.

Away then, away, to the caves, to the rocks !
Ere I own a usurper I'll couch with the fox ;
And tremble, false Whigs, in the midst of your glee,
Ye have not seen the last of my bonnet and me !

WITHIN the substantial walls of the King's Head meanwhile, behind the spot where the trusty little sentinel had mounted guard, the turbulent conclave still held high debate, and was yet far from arriving at any conclusion of its discordant operations. The door, fast shut and "steekit," seemed as little likely as ever to uncloze; the passions and interests gathered there still wrangled fierce and loud—and, to a disinterested spectator, these men, who had met avowedly for the furtherance of a single cause and under the guidance of a single principle, would not have appeared less unanimous if every one had aimed at a separate end and waged an unrelenting opposition against each and all of his fellow-partizans. For the curse of the Jacobites, the curse which attends all failing factions, was disunion. Every individual composing that council, which had assembled to stem with its broken forces the current of a nation's will, had his own opinion of the means indispensable to success, and, while ready at the first call of honour to lay down his life and fortune

at his sovereign's feet, could hardly be brought to yield one iota of his own darling schemes, or bend his will to that of a single leader who might give coherence to the disorderly loyalty and irregular valour of the various members of this unfortunate party. In fact, to describe by one simile the peculiar *dis-organization* of the Jacobites, we might compare them to a heap of sand, which, when firmly held in the closed hand, assumes of necessity the mould of that hand; unclasp the fingers which gave it shape, and the grains fall to the earth in undistinguishable confusion. The touch of a man of genius transformed the incongruous atoms for a few months into the likeness of his own powerful mind; he fell—and each fragment sought its own place, and gradually disappeared amongst the common dust.

But, ominous as the spectacle presented by this gathering must have been to the apprehension of one or two principal Jacobites, gifted with more self-abnegation and common sense than the rest, it would have been picturesque and animated enough in the eyes of a painter to have atoned for any deficiency in that gravity and order which befit such occasions. From forty to fifty gentlemen, mostly men in the prime of life, all elegantly, some splendidly, attired, filled the large and handsome old refectory; not seated in sedate discussion, but split into three or four divisions, of which the largest was composed of the younger and more hot-headed members present. In this, as may be imagined, the voices rose highest, the measures advocated were most impracticable, and the sentiments

promulgated most extravagant. It contained few men of note or experience except the Earl of Linlithgow and our friend Captain Ludovic Crawford, who, although neither noble, chief, nor landholder, was not a person to be shelved when days of hard fighting and hard faring were at hand. He had joined the conference by Dundee's express desire, and had assumed his present post with the rather utopian though very praiseworthy view of moderating the boiling ardour of these impetuous partizans, whose projects all tended more or less to an immediate outbreak, a general massacre of the Whigs, and bombardment of the Parliament House, or even of the city itself, now that it had become a nest of vipers since the new "Whigamore's Raid." On all these moderate and feasible proposals, the veteran smiled ironical approval, while he demolished them one after another with a single sweep of his war-worn hand, and a few pithy sentences, or ingeniously constructed queries, involving a complete demonstration of their impossibility. Still he had but a limited sphere of influence, and began to long for the arrival of Lord Dundee, who, as we have had occasion to mention, was late. And his sense of the necessity for that nobleman's interference derived a great deal of its strength from certain whispers, and latterly more than whispers, circulating amongst another group which surrounded the Marquis of Athol.

It consisted of such gentlemen as owned estates lying on or near what was termed the Highland line, a proximity which brought them under the influence of their powerful neighbour—mixed with a few of his

immediate relations and friends, who regarded him as the natural head of any enterprise in which he might be concerned, and fostered by this means a vanity which needed no stimulus, and that jealous hatred of Lord Dundee which afterwards extended itself with such pernicious results to the cause he defended. This Highland potentate was a good-looking personage, fair complexioned, with blue eyes, aquiline features, and hair of the genuine Celtic auburn; but the mind which should have added dignity to this handsome physiognomy was wanting, and in its place stood, legible to the most careless observer, the stamp of timidity, arrogance, and ferocity, as clearly disclosed by the raised eyebrow and large unsettled eye, with its small pupil and varying *feline* hue, as weakness and sensuality were by the full loose lips and coarse nostril. Nature had done her best to prevent all who might have been so inclined from putting their trust in him.

The marquis had been supping at the King's Head with a party of his own friends, and a few of the vivacious politicians who formed the enthusiastic committee of ways and means at the lower end of the room; and, upon the principle of combining pleasure with business, had to all appearance indulged rather more freely in Lucky Christie's excellent claret and sack than suited the responsible importance of his rank and the motive of his presence there. He was certainly not intoxicated, but his face was flushed, his look more fluctuating than usual, and the tone of his conversation such as to attract the attention of Lord Dunfermline, who with Dunbarton formed the the centre

of the smallest and most rational knot of busy statesmen—the only one in fact where the King's affairs were under serious consideration, or from which any practical advantage was likely to emanate.

There were then present at least half a dozen men who, either by rank, length of service, or loyalty of principle, might have fairly claimed to rival Dundee, but not one who possessed anything to equal his innate power of moulding at will the minds of their fellow-men—of imposing their own convictions with the force of law—not one who owned that great criterion of genius in statesman and leader, the mental *weight* which irresistibly impels forward the temporizers, emboldens the feeble, and imparts an authority to which lesser minds bow the more willingly that they are never made obtrusively conscious of its source or its exercise. It was this superiority, tacitly or openly admitted by Dundee's colleagues in camp and council, which Athol resented as a wilful usurpation of his indefeasible claims to a supremacy which, had he been allowed to attain it, he could not have wielded for a day. He chafed bitterly in private; and in public, not choosing to acknowledge a restraint so irksome at once to his pride of birth and insatiable self-love, took every opportunity of thwarting the designs of his rival; careless, as such men are, of the amount of injury his unprincipled detraction might inflict upon a cause in which he was too intensely selfish to have any interest beyond the mere gratification of a fit of pique against the party which it aimed to overthrow.

On this memorable evening, he had been more than

ever ruffled by a general expression of regret at the viscount's unaccountable delay, and under the influence of this irritation was indulging in no very covert sneers upon the incapacity and want of spirit of the other Jacobite nobles, who chose tamely to submit to the ascendancy of a mere soldier of fortune, instead of selecting as their chief one whose wealth, power, and feudal dignity would help to insure the respect and assistance of certain lawless tribes on the Highland border, and the still wilder clans of the eastern and northern districts. This sentiment, thinly hidden beneath a flimsy pretence of affected reluctance to urge his own interests, was the burden of his speech; and the Earl of Dunfermline, immediately upon perceiving his drift, left his colleagues' side and made his way through the cluster of wavering, half-convinced friends and vassals who formed the great man's audience.

"My lord marquis," said the earl, a tried and trusty friend of Dundee, "you are at this moment giving vent to sentiments against which I most vehemently protest—not only as a friend of one who, Heaven be thanked! can afford to treat such insinuations with the contempt they deserve, but chiefly because they contain a serious imputation upon those judgment and good sense, almost upon the honour, of those nobles and gentlemen who have the *good fortune* (he emphasized the words) to acknowledge him for their chief."

At this direct and spirited challenge, meeting him in the midst of his supporters, Athol coloured violently, but vouchsafed no answer except a supercilious stare,

which, however, had not the effect of daunting the brave old noble.

"You have permitted yourself to speak of Viscount Dundee in a tone and to a tenor which may justly astonish those who can appreciate your relative positions—and, I shall add, importance."

"I spoke of *Colonel Grahame* as a soldier of fortune; there are none here who will undertake to gainsay that statement, I trow," replied Athol turning on his heel.

"Most certainly not, nor deny him to be the most gallant and fortunate soldier whom England and Scotland united can boast; but in the sense in which it has pleased your lordship to apply the appellation, as denoting a low-born adventurer, who holds by chance or has seized by violence a place which does not belong to him, I boldly tell you before all who choose to hear, that you are using behind his back language you would not *dare* repeat to his face, for your arrogance is equalled by the weakness it would fain conceal. I too am a soldier, my lord marquis, who has ere now bearded better men than you or your vassals, and, little as I love dissension of any kind between those who should be banded as brethren in the good cause, James Seton will never stand tamely by to hear such contumelious disparagement of the only commander who can save our beloved country from a usurper, and our King from exile and ruin."

Athol had gradually turned pale with anger during this address, but, like the generality of men of his stamp, he had a very small portion of genuine manliness. He indeed frowned and laid his hand upon the

hilt of his magnificent sword, but the fury which he felt was not so much the honest indignation of insulted self-respect, as the bitter malice of wounded self-love in a heart thoroughly and inherently mean, and the satisfaction which he internally vowed to take for the affront was such as quite suited his character.

He might however for very shame's sake have felt himself compelled to resent by some overt act the interference of Seton, had not the entrance of Dundee and Balcarras, the only guests of any consideration who were yet expected, put a sudden stop to the quarrel before it attained alarming proportions. Dunfermline instantly joined them, leaving Athol considerably disconcerted, but as little disposed as before to abdicate without resistance the leadership he coveted, and for which no man was ever more unfit.

The viscount's arrival at the conference had inspired the greater portion of those who composed it with the expectation that he would immediately present for execution one of those brilliant, but rash and ill-digested schemes, which would have gratified their imprudent zeal; but they were entirely disappointed. His keen glance went swiftly over the whole gathering, and doubtless both eyes and ears brought back such a report as convinced him that the public mind was not yet ripe for the reception of the only plan which could be successfully put in practice—or even convinced of any stringent necessity for unity of action. His own line of battle was, and long had been, perfectly drawn out, and, summoning round him by look and gesture the few confidants of his inmost thoughts, he

submitted to them the last finishing touches by which he had conceived that success might be insured or interruption averted—while they, assured of his fidelity, and feeling the greatness of his genius, threw far away all petty vanity, and gladly became coadjutors where they saw the foremost rank so nobly filled.

But the unconcern with which Dundee himself treated the undisguised antipathy and passed over the offensive self-assertion of Athol, was beyond the philosophy of his friends, and one or two remonstrated with him on the subject.

“*Laissez donc!*” replied Dundee, laughing slightly, “his lordship is doing my business for me; far be it from me to check so laudable an exertion.”

“You are jesting, Claverhouse,” replied George Douglas, Earl of Dunbarton, a brave and skilful officer, whom we have already mentioned as colonel of the regiment of Royal Scots. “This fellow, with an effrontery worthy of himself, has not ceased to undermine by the most unscrupulous and systematic detraction the authority you possess over our ill-assorted party, and, like the dog in the manger, would wrest from you what he could no more use than a babe of six months old could handle my rapier.”

“Perfectly true,” replied the viscount coolly; “he is our bane; I could wish him back again amongst the Whigs, and give them joy of their prize. He is the most disgusting compound of knavery and absurdity any one could wish *not* to see—too much of the wolf to lead, too much of the ass to drive—wherefore I rejoice, as should you, to behold him cutting his own throat so

scientifically—the faster the better. Do you not comprehend, Douglas, and you Colin Lindsay, and you Seton? who marvel at my insensibility to what, good men and honest as you are, alarms you—do you not comprehend, I say, that whatever *prestige* this incapable may have invested himself with, he is destroying, as if expressly for our profit, far more efficaciously than I could venture to attempt without being suspected of the vilest malignity?”

“Right so far,” murmured Douglas, only half persuaded, “but meanwhile he may be doing mischief we shall be unable to counteract.”

“Pardon me, Dunbarton, the louder his vaunt, the higher his claim, the more public and glaring will be his incapacity when put to the test, that is to say, when anything beyond words is demanded of him. All those eager, open-mouthed listeners had still some slight belief in the divinely-inspired talents of a man who can call two thousand five hundred claymores into the field; he is elaborately demolishing that belief in the judgment of all whose assistance is worth having—making the ground ready to my hand; at the proper moment I shall step in and reap the fruits of his self-sacrificing labours. Let the dunghill-cock crow as crouse as he will—I bide my time.”

He knew perfectly well that the propitious moment for interference would present itself, when opportunity might be seized by the forelock—but that time was not yet—and, folding his arms, he leaned back in his chair, his haughty face worn and faded with the incessant anxiety of months past, and seeming still more so

from the contrast of his scarlet dress and rich dark hair—watching with thoughtful brow, and curled lip, and fiery dreamy eye, the propitious instant when all the little noisy streams around him should have brawled and chafed their short fury away, to be swept along by the steady tide of his own eloquence and resolution.

The presumptuous folly of Athol, unchecked by interruption or rebuke, soon reached its most blatant pitch; he was in the full flow of a vehement philippic against men who desired nothing in a so-called loyal rising but the chances of arriving by fair means or foul at distinctions which they could never expect to attain by legal and pacific services—and, to say truth, had overshot the mark—when Lord Dundee rose, and by word and gesture imposed silence on speaker and hearers. He advanced to the head of the table, looking gravely around him, and there was not a glance in that assembly that did not lighten with fresh confidence or deepen into unwonted earnestness as it met the unfaltering gaze of that large clear eye, which read each countenance with such piercing truth, and gave back to each questioning face such a promise of manly faith and honour.

He spoke—and with his first calm yet energetic accents every voice was hushed which yet buzzed and murmured in the apartment—the most turbulent drew near—the most thoughtless stinted in his groundless boast—all clustered round the long table, some seated, some standing, some leaning on their sheathed rapiers, some with chin on hand and critical face, or bending forward with real anxiety to drink in what was in store

for them—but all, save one or two incorrigible cavillers, excited, absorbed, and serious.

Well might they hearken! for the rare and much-abused gift was his to wake up the souls of men—to fire their hearts within them—and to quell at least into short submission the demons of selfishness and vanity which hover over such meetings, sowing the seeds of discord, rending all harmony asunder, and bringing all good resolves to nought. He described with a grave but glowing eloquence, of which no written memorial could convey the power and charm, the sufferings of their banished King, of his lovely wife and infant son, born to the inheritance of three kingdoms, and now poorer than the beggar at his father's palace gates—the lingering wasting agonies of exile—he painted in language which caused many a brow to flush, many a hand to clench, the undying brand of shame which would cleave to the forsworn and coward followers who had crowded round him with oaths of fealty and assurances of devotion until the last hour of his sovereignty had struck, to desert him in his cruel need—all, ministers, councillors, servants, soldiers—all, to his own flesh and blood—all, even to the daughter whom he idolized, and who had fled from him for the love of strangers! He related as one who had seen it the unblushing disloyalty of England's greatest men, their fawning adulation of the Dutch Deliverer (and a low laugh and hiss of scorn went through the hearer's lips in answer to his bitter words), the mutiny of the soldiery, the desertion of his own once trusty regiment, and the last climax of ruin and degradation contained

in the letter of Feversham and the insulting message of the Prince of Orange. And oaths were muttered through ground teeth, and vows of retribution taken, and deep curses breathed on the upstart Boers who now trod like its freemen born upon the soil of England, who would so soon poison with their presence the air of Scotland, summoned, protected, fostered, worshipped by Scots!

The tumultuous murmur was swelling into furious confusion, but Lord Dundee imperiously raised his hand; curiosity prevailed, and he continued.

"I have no need to tell you, gentlemen, what succour can be hoped from this hotbed of fanaticism, where traitors, not single or double, but multifold,—traitors whose whole life is one tissue of lies,—spring up ready grown like tares in the night. I have no need to tell you that in this cause we must go forth like men who have bid a long adieu to all that might tempt them back, for Heaven knows that *here* right has seldom made might! Are you ready?"

"We are!" was the almost simultaneous answer, deep and decided—more than half the assembly rising with the air of men who, having chosen their destiny long before, embrace with gladness an opportunity of declaring that choice without reserve, and pledging themselves beyond all risk of hesitation. Almost all had more or less warmly echoed the exclamation, yet here and there a cautious or dissatisfied countenance still chilled the ready enthusiasm—some timid or startled procrastinator loitered on the bank, instead of plunging boldly into the torrent—and while these

remained to be conquered nothing was accomplished. Lord Dundee resumed, speaking more rapidly, his stately head drawn up, his nostrils dilating, as his clear voice rang like a clarion call through the echoing room.

“ Oh, Scottish men here present !—and not as nobles, not even as gentlemen, do I appeal to you now, but as sons of that iron race who never suffered the foot of a foreign conqueror to tread in triumph on their hills, nor foreign hand to wield the sceptre of their native kings,—heirs of Scotland’s most ancient names, inheritors of her purest blood, will *you* lie down as England’s princes have done, and put your necks below the footstool of this perjured hypocrite, who prates of law, of justice, and of right, while in the face of shamed day he teaches them by so glorious an ensample? Will you take command and high behest from his good pleasure, will you lick his feet for place and pension, for grace and pardon for the crime of having served your lawful monarch? Will you see that aged prince twice a wanderer on the face of the earth, expelled from throne and country, nay, from home and shelter, by—God pity him !—by his own child ! Shall these things be, while one brave man is left in this his native land to shed his blood to gainsay them? Not so ! I cannot read within your breasts to judge betwixt the true and the false—on your own heads be the honour or the disgrace of the part you play—but, if in your souls is lit one spark of the fire which burns in mine, the vow I now take will be the watchword of all—that this sword shall never rest in its sheath until my King sits in Holyrood again, or its master’s hand lie cold and stiff in death : so help me God !”

He threw down upon the table before him his long polished rapier; the shining weapon clashed and rang; responsive to the sound, every inch of steel within the four walls of that crowded hall was bared to the point, and sprang upwards like rays of meteor brilliancy beneath the light of the blazing lamps—glitter and clang, cry and oath, mingling in one instantaneous burst of enthusiasm, which awoke the battle-spirit in the breast of Dundee. It looked out from his flashing eyes, it spoke from his still quivering lips, and gave to the almost feminine beauty of his face and form that wild and terrible radiance which won for him from his Highland followers the strange and significant name of *Ian Dhu nan Cath*,—Dark John of the Battles.

Athol alone hung back, deaf to eloquent words, blind to warlike gesture. If his saturnine countenance varied, it was but to assume a shade of additional sullenness as he sat playing, at first with very ill-feigned *nonchalance*, with the silver tags and ribands of his dress; and afterwards, when such a pretence became impossible to maintain, with his arm resting over the hilt of his sword, and his eyes bent on Dundee; but always and throughout with a manifest, and coarsely manifested, intention of displaying his dissent from everything that was taking place. Yet even he could not but experience a twinge of indefinable humiliation, when alone, amidst the gallant and high-born men who were proclaiming so unreservedly their attachment to James and their trust in his most trusty servant, he did not deign to intimate by the most lukewarm sign the share which he should have borne in their martial

ardour. Ambition—no, not even the meanest form of that sin of great minds—not ambition, but vanity and jealousy, the cankerworm of petty souls, were eating away whatever feeble root of honest loyalty had ever germed within him; and, although he could not yet decide upon separating himself boldly from the Jacobite party and seeking refuge afresh amongst the allies whom he had already betrayed, he had predetermined that he would never consent to play a third or even second-rate part where, in his own estimation, he should have held absolute rule.

In the fullness of his renewed hopes, his exulting pride, this cold reticence of the most important nobleman whom their whole party could number, hung threatening, like the sword of Damocles, over the head of Lord Dundee. He marked it instantly; and mastering, as a skilful rider subdues a headlong steed, the fervid outpouring of his long-compressed passion which had gathered afresh upon his tongue, turned his attention to this difficulty, resolved, like a skilful tactician, to elucidate the situation, and leave no enemy in ambush behind him in the dangerous track on which his feet were set. His conduct on this occasion had all the frank hardihood which was one of his prominent characteristics—as prominent as the high-bred courtesy which modified the stern decision of his interpellation.

“My lord marquis, you are silent—you hold aloof,—and the air of contempt which overspreads your countenance seems to express either scorn of our united intentions or ridicule of our expression of them. In either

case, the present assembly has the right, as well as the wish, to crave some explanation of such sentiments, which everyone must regard as most *singular*, to use no more unpleasant term, in one who owns your name. We listen for it."

And in fact a silence almost embarrassing, so sudden was it, had fallen. The circumstance presented something like the interest of a direct challenge between two champions in the lists; and, so few had any real respect for the marquis, or any sympathy beyond that created by custom and necessity, that his discomfiture was looked for with no great dissatisfaction—personal dislike (by no means unprovoked) and an inevitable comparison between the two rivals—the one marked out by Nature's choicest gifts, the other a mere favourite of fortune—prevailing again over the only partially understood urgency for amity and concord.

Athol raised his unsteady but defiant glance; it sank under that of Dundee, and floated uneasily over the surrounding faces; all, even those which had smiled approbation on him an hour ago, now demanded an answer to the question so closely put. Temper, pride, and quarrelsome instinct, were all stung at once, and he answered with the moodiness of a spoilt child,

"I *am* silent, as becomes me, amongst men who take clamour for loyalty, and vulgar rant for the advocacy of prudent and statesmanlike measures. I have nothing to urge either for or against projects in which I have not had the distinguished honour to be included, or even consulted."

“Marquis of Athol! this is extraordinary language, and most offensive to the gentlemen to whom His Majesty has been pleased to confide the guidance of his affairs in Scotland,” interrupted Sir George Herries of Fordholme, a high-spirited young man, who, although very little acquainted with Viscount Dundee, had been carried away by his dauntless bearing and noble appeal.

“I only know that it has pleased these delegates of His Majesty to exclude from their secret councils one of the King’s most important vassals, making the head of the house of Tullibardine of no more account than the poorest gillie on his domains. I cannot therefore be expected to join in any demonstration of applause or approbation of their designs; and I must needs observe that, in face of the strong probability, the almost certainty, of failure, all this vapouring show of enthusiastic devotedness is absurdly out of place. Reserve it until your first victory has been won, gentlemen, then perchance sober-minded and rational persons may begin to consider it as something better than mere frothy talk.”

The empty petulance of the former part of this sally, and the unrestrained impertinence of the latter, defeated their own purpose. If any who heard him had until then retained some idea that it might be advantageous to acknowledge him as the nominal head of their future enterprise, or had considered him slighted by the obscurity into which he had been thrust by the superiority of Lord Dundee, they were not likely to nourish such unprofitable fancies much longer. A loud

whisper, then an angry protestation, circulated throughout the company; and the universal feeling was put into very firm but temperate words by James Galloway, Lord Dunkeld.

“We Scottish noblemen have an obstinate custom of *never* taking orders as to our conduct, save from our King or his accredited representatives; and a still more unlucky dislike to accepting advice, unless from our superiors in vigour of mind and quickness of parts, and then only when offered with fitting discretion and propriety. You have forgotten yourself, Marquis of Athol. Your proud duinhé-wassels would not brook such treatment as this, much less your *equals*.”

Balcarras and Dundee, whom Athol had chiefly wished to provoke, did not give him any such advantage—both were too desirous of preserving, at any price, the harmony which was again giving way beneath the rude breath of these contending passions; and, if Athol were in truth a weight to clog their movements, he was one which, if cast off, would, in the possession of their opponents, only drag them faster to ruin. Useless, cumbersome, fickle, and selfish, he had yet the peculiar property of such characters—worthless for good to those who held him, he was all powerful for mischief if discarded. Restrained, therefore, by these motives, both waited until Lord Dunkeld had administered his reproof, when the viscount said calmly—

“If any slight has been passed upon my Lord of Athol, none can be more willing and anxious than myself to repair the offence or rectify the mistake.

King James's cause is unhappily at this crisis not in a condition to despise the assistance of the meanest of his lieges; my Lord of Athol's is, I need not say, well nigh indispensable to its immediate, if not its ultimate, success. I have, after mature deliberation, conceived and carefully elaborated a plan of action which I believe to be the only one promising lasting results—that scheme, which has met with the assent of the distinguished gentlemen and experienced officers to whom it has been partially communicated, I shall now, under your favour, proceed to unfold for general approval.”

“ Lord Dunkeld alluded, if I remember right, to his majesty's authorised representative; I humbly crave to be informed whether we are really honoured by the presence of any such, that I may tender my submission in due form to the bearer of the royal mandate,” said the marquis, whom the courteous openness of Dundee's reply had failed to conciliate, and whose excessive irritation was quite as disagreeable in this new form of ostentatious humility as its previous garb of rude conceit.

“ You need not be kept in doubt one instant,” replied Dunbarton and Balcarras in the same breath, “ if you were not, my lord, perfectly well aware of the fact before, which is more than questionable. Viscount Dundee holds that commission in due form, and, if the Marquis of Athol can point out a man in the three kingdoms more competent to exercise it, let him do so; it will be a new hearing to us.”

Dundee's dark eyes softened at the hasty generous warmth of his two friends, but, seeing that something more was expected, he drew from his breast the large

square folded parchment on which the royal letter was inscribed.

"Read it, Balcarras," he said with dignity, placing it in that nobleman's hands, "that all who are not yet cognizant of the distinguished honour which it has been my share to receive may hear our monarch's gracious words, and judge me hereafter if I shrink from any sacrifice I could make to justify them. In the future, if not in the past, I trust they may prove not entirely unmerited."

"My lord viscount, this is most superfluous," exclaimed Sir George Herries, starting up; "there is no other person here who is not fully persuaded of the validity of your powers; it would be equally an insult to you to cavil at your assertion, and an offence to us were any one to suspect our perfect faith in your integrity. I am confident that I only express the feelings of every true loyalist and honest man when I affirm that all who hear me, and thousands who do not, will rejoice that the King owns such a substitute, and will be ready at your first summons to follow you to the death. I at least may speak for myself, and therefore shall from this instant consider myself as under your orders, placing at your disposal every man I can raise and such moneys as my estate will bear, to be by you employed as may best profit my master."

In all bodies of men, however discordant in general opinion, it is rare that an example of spontaneous and hearty generosity does not find imitators. The noble frankness of the young baronet fired the emulation of

his companions, who, no longer contenting themselves with barren protestation of fidelity, declared their readiness to acquiesce in the well-combined plan of their leader, and their willingness to make any effort required of them individually.

As one after another the greater part of the nobles and gentlemen present gave in this encouraging and emphatic adhesion, the countenance of Dundee grew animated with visible delight, which was reflected on the faces of Dunbarton, Balcarras, Seton, and a few more who had been from the first in his confidence, and had foreseen, like himself, the numerous obstacles he was destined to encounter. The Earl of Balcarras nevertheless proceeded, in obedience to a sign from Dundee, to read aloud the King's autograph letter: by which he conferred upon the Viscount Dundee full powers to raise and command troops within his realm of Scotland; to levy contributions, conclude truces, declare peace or war, and act in every respect according to his best judgment for the advancement of His Majesty's rights and the punishment of traitors—concluding with an injunction to all good subjects to render him their duty and obedience, conform to the commission thus bestowed, under pain of His Majesty's severest displeasure.

A general murmur of approbation followed the announcement. Athol begged, with a singular smile, to be allowed to see the parchment.

Lord Dundee's forbearance was well nigh at its lowest ebb, but he was fully determined to go through as he had begun, and bear anything but what was un-

bearable. He very quietly, though with a look that might have told Athol he was treading on unsafe ground, withdrew the letter from his friend's hands and presented it to the marquis.

The latter scanned it, not over respectfully; as his eye fell on certain phrases of flattering eulogy, his lips curled; he turned over to the conclusion, and, unable to discover any flaw in text or signature, pushed it disdainfully back towards Dundee.

"Your lordship is satisfied?" asked the viscount coldly. Athol slightly moved his head, and Dundee added sarcastically,

"You are, I presume, sufficiently acquainted with the royal hand of write to be certified that this is no counterfeit."

"As perfectly as yourself—although I have *not* had the advantage enjoyed by Lord Dundee of seeing it so very recently at the foot of my patent of nobility."

The hot angry blood flashed crimson over the fair face of Claverhouse, then faded—leaving him even paler than before, while exclamations of indignation were vented by all present at this pitiful and unprovoked meanness.

"If the Marquis of Athol knows no better test of merit than the date of a peerage, and can only value the oldest and noblest blood in Scotland by the title its possessor may chance to wear, it is high time that some one should interpose to prove to him the different estimate in which others hold such matters," said Lord Dunfermline severely. "My lord viscount, we owe you thanks for not suffering such trifles to disturb the

complete good understanding which has been so fortunately established, and we are now anxious to show our perfect satisfaction in his Majesty's commands by giving an unqualified assent to everything you intend to propose. It will be long, I warrant me, ere his lordship the Marquis of Athol will read King James's signature appended to any such document as that you carry in your breast."

"Enough said, Dunfermline," replied Claverhouse with cold dignity. "For the assurance of your co-operation in this work I most heartily thank you—let all the rest pass. And so, gentlemen, let us apply ourselves to the detail of this gear with double speed, that so much precious time has been wasted in aimless bickering. I enter upon it in full expectation of the cordial support of those whom I address—without exception—not having yet learned to believe that the unlucky prejudice against myself which the Marquis of Athol seems to have imbibed, from what quarter I know not, will militate in the slightest degree against his activity in favour of our wronged and outraged sovereign."

"Od's my life!" grumbled stout Ludovic Crawford, "what the devil does he mean by standing on such punctilio? A soldier's malison on the fellow's hang-dog face! can't he say *ay* or *no*, and hold up his head like a man? I should just like to put him under the provost marshal's grip—a new withy round his throat, a tough bough hard by, five minutes' grace to say his prayers and declare for King James....."

Part of this after the manner of a soliloquy—part

addressed to Herries of Fordholme, his next neighbour, who certainly did not dislike the picture suggested, and vented in very unparliamentary terms his disgust at Athol's wanton insolence.

"Never fash your beard for that part of the ploy, young man," retorted the veteran, "if Dundee's fiery blood were to be stirred by such as he, it would have been done long ago. 'Sdeath! 'tis too superfluous of these worthy gentlemen to notice such a cur—even on his account; look at him but for one instant, and judge whether he be a likely subject for Athol's lance of straw to wound? Besides, fight with a beggar—and you know the consequences."

Thus pithily winding up his reflections, the old soldier jerked his sword easily under his hand, and composed himself to attend to the proceedings, with the air of one to whom everything is equally agreeable, and who would be ready to undertake the most desperate service with as much dashing unconcern as if it had been a familiar manœuvre at a review; which was really the state of the case.

Nothing could have furnished a more conclusive proof of Lord Dundee's fitness for the post in which his sovereign's confidence had placed him than the masterly plan of operations, civil and military, which he now laid open to his friends. If only put in execution in the spirit and with the boldness which had presided at its creation, there can be little doubt that a most important diversion would have been created in favour of James; and that by the convening of a separate, independent, and strictly speaking more legal, parliament,

backed by a sufficient military force, such a schism would have been fomented as to have rendered William's tenure of Scotland extremely difficult, and not improbably have forced him to abandon all claim to the crown of that country. As events really turned out, this is of course a mere conjecture; no human prevision could discern the fatality which attended every struggle of the doomed monarch and his partizans—and nothing but that fatality could have brought failure on a plan so large in conception, yet so practical in every part—and to all appearance so certain of success. The share in its execution assigned to each of the confederates was distinguished by that acute and intimate knowledge of capacity, disposition, and availability which Balcarres describes in such marked terms in his letter to James, after the death of Lord Dundee had made his friends sensible of the irreparable vacancy that fall left in the Royalist cause. His experience of human foibles in general, and those of his friends in especial, served him so well, that, wonderful to relate, all were nearly satisfied; and responded to the viscount's closing exhortation with an energy which elevated his hopes to a height they had not attained since the day he reached Edinburgh, and discovered upon how unstable a foundation his designs of a counter-revolution there had been built. Even the frivolous jealousy of Athol seemed to have expended itself for a while, and he engaged to furnish from the warriors of his numerous and martial clan such a body of well-appointed Highlanders as should overawe any resistance which might be offered to the meeting of the New Estates at

Stirling—a town which, from its loyal spirit, central position, excellent military defences, and proximity to the Highland border, was calculated to afford the Jacobites the most admirable head quarters they could require.

The last contingencies had been provided for, the last difficulties smoothed down, some of the councillors had betaken themselves to their houses to set in order such private business as might hamper their subsequent movements, and the assembly began to melt away, leaving a few of its more prominent members still in conference with Dundee—and amongst them Athol. The viscount had too long ago sounded, we were about to say the *depths* of his character—the *shallows* of that muddy stream would be a more appropriate term—to delude himself with the belief that lasting consistency could ever be expected from that quarter; but for the present he would be too injurious as an enemy, too valuable as a protector, or rather as an instrument of protection, for such a man as Claverhouse to indulge his own feelings of most warrantable repulsion and dislike when they were such as might endanger his sovereign's interest. He exerted himself with consummate tact to soothe the sullen and irritable mood of his ally, and succeeded so well that there seemed a real chance of the marquis continuing in his new frame of mind, at least until he should have brought his good claymores from their hills, and placed them under the command of Dundee. That point gained, the viscount might safely reckon on his own power over the hearts of those brave and excitable men to countervail any

attempt their chieftain might afterwards make to detach them again from his standard.

We may here observe, as the course of our narrative will prevent our doing so later, that Lord Dundee's too sanguine expectation was utterly deceived, and that six-and-thirty hours afterwards its feeble and treacherous object destroyed either by sheer incapacity or abject cowardice the fairest chance that ever offered for restoring the balance of power to the Jacobite side.

The guests who had lingered to the last dropped off one by one; Claverhouse and his friends Dunbarton and Dunfermline were left alone together, except half a dozen gay young men, who had agreed to conclude the evening in more convivial style than by dull protestations and thirsty speech.

"Take care, take care, young man!" said Lord Dundee laying his hand upon the shoulder of Sir George Herries; "what manner of preparation is this for such a venture as ours?"

"Pshaw, my Lord Dundee! you are over squeamish!" replied Herries laughing, "a wassail cup in your honour—nothing more. We Border men have strong heads and stout arms, and it is never the drinking of a health to Scotland's champion that will weaken the one or the other. Fill up, gentlemen! Archie Douglas, my Lord of Rothes, one and all—no stinted measure to the name and fame of the gallant Dundee—the boldest heart, the readiest hand, the clearest head that ever were owned by belted knight!"

The toast was drunk with enthusiastic applause, and

Claverhouse, with all due courtesy, tendered his thanks for their flattering opinion.

"If I deserve one of your commendations, that of a clear head," he added smiling, "I do not scruple to confess that I owe it in great part to my custom of never drowning in the wine-cup whatever portion of mother-wit it hath pleased dame Nature to bestow on me. However I will pledge you once, gentlemen, in acknowledgement of your politeness, before leaving you to your entertainment, which I request may not be prolonged beyond sober bounds."

He did so, after receiving an assurance that they would separate in reasonable time.

The three elder noblemen came out into the house-porch, near which a knot of servants were waiting their pleasure, and stood there for a few minutes' chat before separating. The rain which had been threatening all the evening still held up, although the veil of mist which had hitherto softened the light of the full moon to a silvery, all-pervading gleam—more like early morning than dead of night—had gathered now into thin black wreaths of cloud, which rolled rapidly along, now obscuring, now revealing, a few timid stars; the wind came free and strong across the open country beyond the ramparts; every thing was so fresh and quiet by contrast with the atmosphere of noise, of heat, and of agitation they had just quitted, that Lord Dundee bared his brow to the cool night-breeze, and looked up with positive pleasure to the bright, mild canopy above them.

"Fair weather enough for my young cousin's jour-

ney," he said. "By-the-bye, Dunfermline, you have had some opportunity of judging him lately. What do you think of him?"

"Most highly," replied the old earl. "I believe that even you will one day be proud of your pupil. I knew his father well, but this lad has more in him by far. I never could understand, Claverhouse, how his mother came to prefer William Bethune to John Grahame."

Claverhouse only laughed, and said,

"This evening's combinations have rather changed my wishes with regard to his route, but it is too late now to repent."

"Not in the least, my lord; I am very much at your service for a forced march—you have but to say the word."

Lord Dundee almost started.

"My trusty Crawford, good at need! I thought you safe at quarters, if not sound asleep, man!"

"Very likely, my lord. But I too conjectured, having the use of my ears and my reason, that you might stand in want of a messenger, and, *me voilà*."

"Away then, kill as many horses as you like, catch him before he leaves Perth, and bid him stay there. You will carry on his dispatches to Dudhope and Forfar, but above all things—hark ye, hither."

He took Crawford apart, and entrusted to him some particular orders, impressing them upon him with great earnestness; and the soldier strode off at a lively pace, whistling "Dunbarton's drums."

The nobleman who bore that title had already turned

off towards his house near Bristo Port, Claverhouse and Seton taking a cross wynd into the Potter's Row, which they followed until they neared the precincts of the University.

"I will not allow you to accompany me one step further," said the viscount, who knew that his friend lodged in one of the houses which from the south of the Grass Market overlook the Grey Friars Church and Heriot's Hospital, "you have already come some distance out of your road."

"I am loth to leave you," replied the other. "Rumours are about of some project of these fanatics against our chief men, and especially yourself."

"The likelihood of injury attaches fully as much to you as to me," replied Lord Dundee.

"Your servants?" inquired Dunfermline.

"Oh, I have Pate Johnstone, and one of my troopers, Muir, a perfect daredevil, worth any two men when sober, and any four when drunk, which is his usual condition. I don't know whether I ought to say *unfortunately*, under the present circumstances. We are six good men, you see, upon that computation, and I know of no place between this and the Netherbow where a regiment could lie in ambush."

Dunfermline laughed, but rather seriously, and they parted; Seton turning westward towards home, Lord Dundee descending the College Wynd towards the Cowgate.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE NIGHT OF THE 16TH OF MARCH.

Have ye heard how the Ridleys and Thirlwalls a'
And Willimoteswick, and Hardriding Dick,
And Hughie o' Harden, and Will o' the Wa',
Have set upon Albany Featherstonhaugh,
And taken his life at the Deadmanshaw?

* * * * *

Hout, hout! the auld man's slain outright!
Lay him wi' his face down, he's a sorrowfu' sight!

WE would not have it inferred from the fact of his name being as yet absent from our pages that Jock Maclean had proved false to his mission—quite the reverse. Nevertheless, it cannot be died that a certain somnolence (superinduced perhaps by the convivial temptations of Tam Leckie and Symmie Brand) had rather enervated the pristine vigour with which he had at first assumed his sentryship, and had even so far snatched him from himself as to confound the voices of the distinguished gentlemen in the porch near with those of the beguiling prodigals who had wiled him away that evening to share their precocious revelry; so that Lord Dundee and his friend were twenty yards or more from the tavern when Jock's faculties returning showed him two unpleasant things, first, that he had lost an excellent opportunity of executing his business, and, secondly, that he was on the point of becoming an unfaithful steward and mansworn traitor.

At least that was his horrified view of the negligence which had succumbed to sleep on an occasion which should have "murdered sleep." He sprang at one bound from his elevated station; but he had once neglected Chance, and that deity now took her revenge. His left foot slipped as it alighted on the round smooth stones of the pavement, and, on trying to use it, he found that his ankle was, if not sprained, so twisted as to be excessively painful.

Sensible however of the vital necessity for placing Alice's letter in Lord Dundee's hands, the poor boy tried to drag himself along in pursuit of the little group, which was not advancing at such a pace as to destroy all possibility of rejoining it; but, as the figures began to grow indistinct in the darkness, and the distance increased with alarming steadiness, Jock hailed them with a cautious call, in the hope of stopping them. The exclamation was heard by Pate Johnstone, who listened to catch the quarter whence it came, but, seeing nothing, shrugged his shoulders, and, not choosing to disturb his master's conversation, paid no attention to it.

Luckily the few sentences exchanged between Claverhouse and Lord Dunfermline gave the zealous pursuer some advantage, which he improved to the uttermost, the departure in a different direction of the earl and his armed servant increasing Jock's remorse for his previous carelessness by redoubling the danger which menaced the viscount. Claverhouse and his attendant had only gone a few steps down the steep College Wynd, when a louder shout, uttered by Jock in desperation, brought both to a standstill.

"Patrick, Muir, close up," said the viscount, "we may as well neglect no precaution. See to your pistols; Andrew, give me yours—mine are unloaded."

But only one person was near; Dundee looked round.

"Where is Muir?" he asked quickly; "I thought he was with us."

"Andro Muir will ha' been drinkin' himsel' drunk again, I trow; and then your lordship may gang to the de'il wi' a' other things and folk," responded Pate Johnstone in a surly tone. "Never a speck o' him has been ahint ye, my lord."

"How so? my orders were most positively given that he should attend me to-night," said Lord Dundee hastily.

"As clearly as ye speak noo," answered Patrick. "But as I gied him yer commands maist peremptory, and he hasna obeyed them, ye maun wyte wi' him and no me, my lord."

"I do not make you responsible for his absence, but for not having informed me of it before," replied his master, with some displeasure. "Foolhardiness is no merit in my eyes, but some folk, yourself included, seem to hold it twin brother to courage. Hark! there is that call again! your name, if I hear right."

A small hurrying figure now came into view, stumbling along in an odd halting way and repeating its weird shrill summons, "Pate Johnstone, wait ye there!" ever more eagerly as it neared them.

Poor Jock was spared a small portion of his toilsome

journey, for, struck by his persistence, the viscount turned back to discover what he wanted.

"De'il roast me then, if ye arena Jock o' the King's Head!" exclaimed Pate, when near enough to observe the messenger's yellow shock head and other personal characteristics. "What are ye crying upon me for, ye deevil's buckie? Get ye to yer mammy and be whippit—it'll take the wild blood out o' ye, my lad."

"Ye are frack, Maister Johnstone," replied the admonished party, whose dignity defied even the loss of wind to abate.

"What are ye doing in the streets?"

"A gude turn to your ain master. I hae a letter to his lordship."

"You must be mistaken, my lad," said the viscount, signing to the servant to hold his peace.

"Mista'en! I trow not, if ye are Lord Dundee, as I take ye to be," said Jock. "Look to the letter itsel'."

"Who can have chosen such a manner of forward-ing one to me?" said the viscount, in astonishment.

"Care ye not for that, my lord, it comes frae ane that would na beguile ye, I'se be caution. There's your life in that scrap o' black and white. Read it."

But, in order to follow this advice, it was absolutely necessary for them to re-ascend the wynd, as far as the western front of the college. This was not the edifice which at present occupies the same site, and which was founded precisely a century later, but the ancient building originally erected in 1590 on the ground where formerly stood the Kirk o' Field, celebrated as the scene of Lord Darnley's death, and at *that* time

considered almost a country place. Over the door which gave entrance to it on the western side projected an iron arm to which was hooked one of those oil-lamps, few and far between, which made darkness visible to Auld Reekie's nocturnal passengers. By that Lord Dundee contrived, not without trouble, to decipher the small cramped writing, the hand of one unaccustomed to the labours of the pen.

"For the hands of the most noble the Viscount of Dundee, these, from a true friend.

"My lord, take guard and most careful watch over yourself, you are marked for death. Three men, your inveterate enemies, have bound themselves under a vow to slay you to-night. I know not when or where the attempt will be made, but, for the sake of all who love you, take heed."

"Who gave you this?" asked Dundee as he folded up the short but valuable epistle, and put it into his pocket. Jock looked open-eyed with amazement at his perfect imperturbability.

"I am forbid to say," my lord.

"What can you mean by that? I insist upon knowing; this pretended warning may be only a lure, and you its ignorant instrument."

"Ye dinna think that, my lord, I ken vera weel," answered the lad boldly. "I swear that the hand that writ it is as honest as your ain, and I would scorn to deceive ye. And for telling ye wha has stude your friend, it wad be as easy as to say my name, but I hae gi'en my Bible aith to hauld it secret, and buits and pinnywinkles suldna gar me perjure mysel' any mair

than they would you. Ye'll forgie me for saying it, my lord."

"It was very well said, my good boy," said Dundee, laughing at his solemn earnestness. "So hie you back to my unknown friend, and tell him that, whether his warning save me or not, I am none the less his debtor."

Jock's mind being finally eased of its last load, he took the hint and left them, looking back as long as he could see anything, to enjoy the certainty that it was to the viscount's self, and to no wraith or delusion of any kind, that he had delivered his commission, so very problematic at one moment had his success appeared.

The viscount and his servant meanwhile, ignorant of where the danger lay, hesitated what expedient to adopt in order to avoid it. The most obvious plan was to choose a different route from the two or three which more or less circuitously led towards the Netherbow—the nearest point of the High Street to the viscount's residence; but it was so evident that the assassins had had private intelligence of his occupations and movements that evening, and the expressions of the letter were either purposely or unavoidably so indistinct, that he might by this very deviation from the straight road fall into the ambush set for him in some cut-throat alley of that dark and intricate quarter of the town; still he resolved upon risking it. Long usage, constant exposure, and a temperament to which the fear of death was an unknown sensation, had rendered him almost inaccessible to such alarms; but, like many other men incontestably, nay adventurously, brave,

Dundee loved life, and enjoyed it with the keen zest of a nature which, lukewarm in nothing, found in labour, in ambition, in intense activity, the pleasure, the positive sensuous delight, usually supposed to reside in ease and wealth and gratifications of a softer kind. He would have been forward and willing to lay down his life for a distinct and (to his mind) a worthy purpose; but to have it stolen in an inglorious midnight fray, without profit to anyone, revolted him.

“This way, Patrick,” said he, after a short interval of reflection. “If these sleuth-hounds track us, so be it; we will give them the longest run and the warmest reception they could possibly expect.”

So, drawing his sword, and disposing his cloak after a fashion of the day, so as to protect his left and leave his right arm at liberty, he bade Patrick look to his pistols, and follow him closely; and thus, without bravado, as without trepidation, they pursued their way by a different road towards the Cowgate, passing the south front of the College. Both, while keeping a sharp look-out, were nevertheless occupied with a separate set of reflections. Patrick Johnstone was endeavouring to connect various suspicious incidents, which had not originally struck him as such, with the unaccountable failure of Andrew Muir’s attendance; Lord Dundee pondering over the authorship of the mysterious billet; all his conjectures regarding it tending irresistibly to one centre, as if his ideas had escaped his own control. Patrick, finding that his master did not speak, and supposing him to be engaged with the

same cogitations as himself, edged close to his elbow, and said in a prudent half-whisper,

"What think ye noo, my lord, o' Andro Muir? what hae ye to say till him?"

"That his conduct looks bad, Pate; yet, sot and hellrake as he always was, Andrew bore the repute of a bold, trustworthy fellow in all cases where his foibles were not likely to interfere; and, if he has been overtaken in some drunken bout, that would be bad enough when under orders—we need not suspect him of treachery without a shadow of proof."

"Aweel," returned Pate, with an air of dissatisfaction, which he sometimes thought fit to assume with a master whom he had carried in his arms when an infant, "aweel, Claver'sc, ye hae a gate o' believin' in certain folk that's dumbfounderin' to me, after living the years ye hae lived in this warld; but it's just idle to look for auld heads on young shouthers. When yer moustache is lyart as mine, and the runcles and corbie claws are on yer smooth cheeks, may be ye'll learn wisdom, and see clearer."

"What then have you seen to give you such infallible penetration into Andrew Muir's innermost soul?" asked Dundee rather amused.

"I'll tell ye, my lord. Ye maun ken—but whisht!"

They had entered a winding passage, even more irregular in shape than the famous West Bow, leading from the neighbourhood of the University to a point of the Cowgate eastward of the place where the South Bridge, then unbuilt, crosses that thoroughfare. This

passage still exists under the name of Infirmary Street, but the public edifice from which it takes that name did not exist then, nor until the middle of the eighteenth century, and the alterations and reforms of one hundred and seventy years, however imperceptibly conducted, have not left much of the aspect which met the eyes of our present subjects on the night in question. On the right hand, immense yet mean and dirty houses were crowded thickly over the ground between the old Pleasaunce Port and the more modern Drummond Street; on the left, a mass still more dense stood upon the space enclosed by the passage itself, the back of the Cowgate, and what is now called South Bridge Street. It was pierced by various paved closes of a few feet in breadth, issuing on to one or the other thoroughfare by low archways; and, to save description, the dinginess, airlessness, filth, and unpleasing nature of its arrangements generally were such as to inspire us of the nineteenth century with the poorest idea of our forefathers' sanitary principles and love of cleanliness.

At that hour the street bore, with its enormous buildings, rude frontage, and irregular construction, no bad resemblance to a mountain gully with a strip of wan sky overhead, which just shed down along the rugged faces of the ravine so much light as to afford a footing and no more; but the viscount's eye had caught, simultaneously with his servant's, a black shadow which had crossed in the obscurity from one side of the wynd to the other, disappearing into an opening scarcely five feet broad on their right hand.

"We are certainly watched, Patrick," said Lord Dundee; "step slowly. No, I shall go first. There is some pitfall ready for us in this neighbourhood, and we have run our heads into the noose. We must 'gang warily' as the Drummond's motto hath it."

"Drummond, my lord? I hae seen that limb o' Satan here in this town—It was he that Muir——"

A thin stream of light, which seemed to issue from the wall of a house opposite which they stood, made good Dundee's words. It was a pistol-shot—the hand steady, the aim singularly correct, for as the viscount, by an instinct which almost preceded the danger, threw himself a step forward, the ball whistled by him and flattened itself upon the stone framework of a window a few inches from his head.

"Your sword, my lord, your sword! we are beset, we are lost!" cried Patrick Johnstone, as the flash revealed three figures at the entrance of the dark archway which had swallowed up the first they had perceived.

"Lost, when we are two to three?" exclaimed Dundee, with a defiant laugh. "Your pistols, man!"

Two sharp clicks, two successive detonations, and Patrick, who, at the first glimpse of the assassins, had flung himself before his beloved master, staggered backwards, and with a deep groan sank at his feet, shot through the heart by the double discharge—the pistol which he had been in the act of firing going off in his hand.

An exclamation of grief and vengeance broke from

the viscount, but, as it passed his lips, another ball whistled by him, a second pierced his hat, missing the brain by a finger's breadth, and, with drawn rapiers, the three assailants rushed upon him.

Like fiery springing serpents the four blades writhed together, striking a shower of sparks from their edges; but the disorderly impetuosity of the assassins had for a moment balked their intentions, and two drew back a step to recover breath, and choose their ground. One alone continued to thrust savagely before him, reckless of defence in his blind tiger-thirst for his opponent's destruction.

"The day of reckoning is come!" he hissed through his closed lips, as his rapier in one furious lunge entwined itself with that of Claverhouse, and he pressed upon him with the rage of a demoniac. "Coward, tyrant, liar! dost thou know me?"

"Ay, by this token!"

A fearful oath was on the bravo's tongue—it changed to a hoarse, gurgling sound, choked by a rush of blood—the sword of Claverhouse had passed through him from breast to back. His own dropped, and, in the desperate attempt to grapple with his enemy hand to hand, life forsook him, and he fell forward across the body of Johnstone, nearly overthrowing Lord Dundee in his fall.

The assailants were now reduced to two; but still the odds were great, the situation critical, and Claverhouse did not attempt to conceal it from himself. Flight was impossible; his daring soul repulsed the idea as equally useless and disgraceful; and, in

that quarter of the city, crowded from garret to cellar with adherents of the Presbytery, one shout for help would have brought fifty foes for every defender. He could expect no protection but that which his own skill and courage might afford, and that he trusted. He retreated rapidly, fighting every step of the way, until he reached a lamp (no municipal benefit, but the private luxury of some vainglorious burgess); beneath it he posted himself with his back to the wall, thus not merely protecting himself against any attack from behind, but, by a masterly manœuvre, compelling his assassins to fight in full light, whilst he remained in comparative obscurity.

Lord Dundee was an admirable swordsman, but he soon discovered that all the perfect control of his weapon acquired in the schools of France, all the vigilance of an eye unclouded by excess, all the unrivalled activity of a wrist of steel, would be required, and more than required, to hold his own against the vindictive ferocity of these two men, who sought his death with an obstinacy as unflinching as if each had had to repay a lifetime of misery and dishonour. One of them was a remarkably powerful man armed with a heavy broadsword, which told poorly against the long, beautifully poised rapier of Dundee, in a hand to which the most refined and dexterous expedients of the noble science were familiar; the second, slight, short, and better armed, as well as evidently more expert in the practice of hand-to-hand *mêlée* at close quarters, was, by his expertness and agility, far more dangerous than his comrade. Singly, neither could

have sustained the encounter beyond the first half-dozen passes, but no man who has any experience of such encounters would assert that *one* can ever in the long run maintain a successful resistance to two, unless aided by accidental circumstances, which did not seem likely to interfere in favour of Lord Dundee.

The duel (if such a misnomer be permissible, where three persons are concerned) had lasted with extraordinary animosity for a space of time which did not probably exceed a few minutes: no wound had been given or received; but the assassins, spurred to additional exasperation by the address and boldness of their adversary, began to press on him with redoubled rage, and at each fruitless blow, each empty pass foiled by that rapier which seemed to transform itself into fifty blades to meet their own at every "vantage-coign,"—words of bitter wrath came up with the labouring breath of the older combatant.

"Persecutor of the saints! thy judgment is nigh! the dogs shall lick thy blood in the high places of the city!"

"Saints, quotha? saint-like doings!" retorted Claverhouse sneeringly.

As he spoke the sword point of Heatherfield caught the jewelled badge of the Thistle which the viscount wore over his dress, and thus again the merest accident preserved him. The very next instant, he had by one well-directed thrust driven the Cameronian backwards, closed with him, and sent his sword flying through the air by the same stroke, ripping up his sword-arm from wrist to elbow.

The pain was so intense that the man staggered aside with a yell like that of a beast of prey, and Dundee, left with one enemy still alert and vigorous, turned all his strength to that quarter. It was high time, for the movement which had rid him of Heatherfield was one in which he had risked his life to save it; leaving him for the time utterly at the mercy of the younger man. He now faced round, quick as thought, but the advantage had been seized, and Dundee felt the cold steel traverse the thick cloak which was wrapped round his left arm and graze his side;—for the third time death had passed him by!

The sudden chill of the icy blade, the first trickling of his own warm blood, fired that blood to liquid flame. The rapier of Norman Scott was shivered like glass in another second—one more, and his mortal account had been closed for ever, the fate of Scotland changed—when Heatherfield, as if possessed by the fiend which had dictated the savage menace of Drummond, bounded, disabled as he was, upon Lord Dundee, and, clutching him by the throat, dragged him down with the whole immense impetus of his weight. In one struggling mass they fell together; Heatherfield, with his knee on the viscount's breast, and his hands, dyed with his own blood at his enemy's neck, had thrown himself upon the abhorred victim, resolved never to release him while a spark of life remained. And that life would speedily have been extinct, but that at the first effort Heatherfield's lacerated arm sank paralysed at his side.

“To the rescue, Norman Scott! for the Lord and

his oppressed people! Seize his weapon, this mighty man of valour, and slay the Philistine with his own steel!"

The young assassin strove by several tremendous efforts to wrench from Dundee the rapier which he still firmly grasped—but, half-stunned, half-suffocated, the viscount had yet sufficient presence of mind to know that to yield it would be signing his own death warrant, and Norman could as easily have burst the hoops of the hilt asunder as have extricated it from the fingers welded round it. He rushed to seek the lost sword which had been wrested from Heatherfield—his own was broken.

During that momentary respite, Lord Dundee, who felt that his senses were rapidly failing him—for his light, slender frame, although close-knit and active, bent like a reed under the herculean weight of Heatherfield—collected all his energies in one convulsive struggle, stiffened his left arm like a bar of iron, forced away for one single gasp the strangling gripe of the Cameronian, and, prostrate as he lay, dealt his assassin such a furious blow in the face with the pommel of his sword as to wring from him a scream of torture.

"Hither, hither, Norman Scott! strike at once, and to the heart!"

For the seconds which followed how shall we paint, not the terror of death, but the horrible physical agony of that balance-point between time and eternity? Pinioned to the earth, crushed beneath what seemed a mountain load, every bone and nerve and sinew starting—a mist of blood floated before his straining

sight, through which glared the wolfish face of Heatherfield, the tiger eyes of Norman Scott; while in his ears, as in those of a drowning wretch, rang a wild clamour of shouts and cries, and a rushing chaos of sound—a flash of fire—a blaze of blinding light—then outer darkness——

For a minute or an age—he knew not which.

His senses returned, and the scene had shifted like a vision. The dark, writhing group of secret murder was the centre of a semicircle of agitated spectators, his breath came free, his breast heaved light—Heatherfield had vanished—and Norman Scott, after a second vain attempt to accomplish his purpose of stabbing the viscount as he lay, had dashed head foremost through the ring of captors, and fled in the steps of his accomplice.

“Follow, follow, men alive! will you let the ruffians escape? Twenty broad pieces to whoever brings them back, my lads!”

They needed no hounding on—a general halloo had been raised on the track of the Cameronian, and the trampling of feet and the cries of pursuit wound away in the devious mazes of the neighbouring lanes.

The speaker, who was none other than Sir George Herries, now first observed whom he had so luckily arrived in time to preserve; and great was his astonishment on beholding Lord Dundee, who at first had remained half insensible, but was now rising or rather trying to rise—bruised, exhausted, and panting.

“Good Heavens! are you injured—wounded? what frightful devilry is this?” exclaimed Herries.

"My lord, tell me the worst—you are covered with blood!"

"Not all my own, thank God," muttered the viscount, supporting himself dizzily against the projecting jamb of a door near which the combat had taken place. "A few bruises, I think—a blow on the head—nothing of any consequence—"

He closed his eyes, turned excessively pale, and spoke so faintly that Herries thought it necessary to offer some assistance, but the viscount thanked him, and after a short pause recovered himself partially and said—"I really believe I am quite unhurt, except a scratch on the side; but never did man see a nearer or uglier vision of death, to be on this side the grave. A thousand thanks, Herries, for your friendly succour—one thought more, and I was sped."

"But your dress, your hair, your hands are bloody, can you be indeed unwounded?"

"I should certainly *not* have been if my amiable companions of the last quarter of an hour could have compassed their intent," replied Claverhouse, as he regained possession of his hat, and adjusted the disarray of his torn and soiled dress, which had suffered severely from the violence of his late antagonists.

"Who are the wretches? Whigs, I conclude," said young Herries, asking and answering his own question.

"They are. I have the honour of knowing them all. One lies yonder, slain by me, the others you saw—and Herries"—he laid his hand on the young gentleman's shoulder with a dark look—"those three men's lives

have each severally hung upon a nod of my head, a turn of my finger—and I spared them all.”

Herries looked and expressed himself surprised, as well he might be, at so singular a coincidence—he had, however, no opportunity to muse on it, for Dundee added,

“Yonder too lies, beneath my would-be murderer, the body of my good old servant Pate Johnstone, a victim to his love for me. He is, I fear, beyond remeid.”

They went back to the spot, where a little way off the motionless heap of ruined life could be distinguished—a lad who had stayed behind when his companions gave chase escorting them with his smoky, flaring torch, for there was no public lamp but that which had witnessed the preceding scene.

The dead men were stretched one above the other—Pate Johnstone, who had fallen first, undermost—while the corpse of Drummond, face downwards, lay across that of the lowly but generous martyr to his unmerited malignity. The viscount signed to the lad to remove the body—the order was with some trouble obeyed, Herries assisting—and Lord Dundee knelt down to examine whether any trace of life was left in that of his faithful attendant. He touched the pulse—unfastened the old man’s doublet and laid his hand over the heart, but the skin was already growing cold, and the large, marked features beginning to assume that sharpened fixity which death alone produces.

“He is no more!” said his master rising. “Poor fellow! This will be sad news for his brother. A faithful dependant is as rare as a real friend, and he

- had been mine for nearly five-and-thirty years, that is, ever since I can remember myself."

He turned aside in some emotion, and looked at the countenance of Drummond, threatening in death as in life—the light, fierce eyes, open, dull, and glassy; the thick, overhanging brows drawn down by a dreadful frown; the face distorted by a spasm which had fixed an awful stamp of his living deeds on the dying lineaments. His lips were drawn widely apart, and the clenched teeth held a fragment of Johnstone's dress which they had torn off in the last throes of the death-agony. It was a fearful sight—the murderer struck down in his crime, the blasphemer called to his account with godless words, yet breathing from his livid lips. Herries walked away—the viscount looked sternly on, while the torch flared and flickered in the red pool at his feet, which slowly spread as one by one the torpid drops still plashed sullenly from the dead man's side; and a cloud of anger, disgust, and regret settled on his pale, grave brow.

Herries again inquired what knowledge he had of his assailants, and Lord Dundee was about to reply, but was interrupted by the return of the party which had pursued Heatherfield and his accomplice, and which consisted of three or four servants belonging to Herries and Archibald Douglas, headed by the latter. They had only succeeded in overtaking one of their chases, the other had contrived to baffle them.

That one was Norman Scott.

A few hours before these two men had gazed into each other's minds from afar, and read them aright;

and with that meeting of spirit had come the first thrill of fear, if fear it was, that ever shook the soul of the proud Grahame. The first and last—for, as the men approached leading the young fanatic, erect, defiant, and sullen, Dundee made a few steps to meet them, and bent his glance upon the prisoner, haughty and composed as if his innermost heart had not told him, in that voice which is clearer than all human probabilities, that he was in presence of his fate.

He *knew* that it was so, but never more could Claverhouse feel fear. Their gaze met, and Norman's pale, scowling glance quailed before the eye of his intended sacrificial victim.

"You doubtless wish him to be conveyed to the nearest guardhouse, my lord," suggested Herries; and, without awaiting the answer, Archibald Douglas began to give orders to that effect.

"By your favour, Mr. Douglas," said the viscount, "I intend the prisoner to be lodged to-night in my own house. You look surprised, but be assured I have my reasons for it. With your escort I do not imagine myself to be in any further bodily danger from him, especially as your fellows are securing him with such right good will."

Two of the servants had just taken off their leathern belts, and effectually put their captive beyond mischief. The others now, by Lord Dundee's desire, prepared to convey the corpse of Patrick Johnstone to his residence for fitting interment. One of them cast a curious sidelong look at Drummond, and asked what was to be done with him.

“Leave him there!” said Dundee with an imperious gesture; and they left him—cold, stark, stiffening in his own gore, his threatening, lightless eyes turned up to the pale, stormy sky—the end he had sought and gained.

The sad procession went on in front with the corpse of the brave old servant; the viscount and Sir George Herries came behind, conversing. Dundee inquired with much curiosity concerning what he had not as yet had time to consider, namely, the singularly opportune arrival of the two young gentlemen and their attendants.

“The thing is a great deal more simple than you would suppose,” replied Herries. “A very short time after you left the tavern we were disturbed by a variety of most lamentable shrieks and wails, which turned out to proceed from a little lad the son of the hostess, who was undergoing powerful chastisement at the hands of that buxom dame in consequence of some transgression of rules. The boy would not acknowledge his reason for disobedience, and held out so sturdily that I took upon myself to act as mediator, upon condition that he would make me his father-confessor, promising easy absolution. So the poor little culprit allowed himself to be primed with a modicum of canary, and thereafter confided to me, with every appearance of truth, that he had got himself into his late domestic difficulties through having been employed, by a person whom he would not name, to convey to yourself, my lord, information of a plot against your life, to be put in practice this very night. Upon my

imparting the intelligence to our companions, it was instantly proposed that we should start on your road, and escort you safely home. We separated into three parties, each taking a different way, and I was fortunate enough to rejoin you at a crisis when I think my succour was needed."

"Most emphatically," replied the viscount. "I was as helpless as a log in that fellow's power—very nearly strangled—and his disciple had absolutely missed one stab at my breast. A second would have been more true, and the Highland dames spared the trouble of chanting the coronach over the remains of Ian Cean Dhu!"

"As you say that you know the villains, you can perhaps guess their motives for this outrage," said Herries.

"The bravo whom we left yonder for his kin the dogs to find, was one of my own men whom I was compelled last year to expel from the service which he had dishonoured, as he had the fair name of gentleman which he once owned. The second, who has I see escaped, is a furious Cameronian, who would give odds to Mitchell, Hackstoun, and Burley, and round whose throat the withy has so often been twisted that it is prodigious how his fingers ever became so painfully familiar with mine. The third—that young hyæna cub there ——"

"Well?" asked Herries.

"Marvellous it is how things fall out in this knotted, tangled hesp of a world! Can you believe me, Herries, that I have the conviction of his being the bro-

ther of the zealous friend to whom I partly owe that I am not as the dead dog we have just quitted."

"A most troublesome predicament—you must feel it so, my lord."

"I could not swear to the fact, but the name, age, appearance, and character all correspond unmistakably. I cannot decide yet, I must see—examine.—It is something frightful to my mind," he continued in a slow, thoughtful tone, "something frightful to dwell, even in conjecture, upon the suspicion that a brother's blood can have been wilfully, knowingly betrayed for me!"

His young friend was rather puzzled by this half-soliloquy; and, as Lord Dundee offered no other remark, Herries respected his abstraction, and they finished their walk in silence.

We cannot pause to describe the anger and grief of Allan Johnstone at the dismal sight which met him on the viscount's arrival at home. His master's authority was hardly sufficient to restrain him from wreaking its first transports upon Norman Scott, who, still bound, was placed in the guard-room under the charge of two of Herries's servants. Allan remained with his brother's body, and Lord Dundee, after addressing to him such expressions of condolence as his own regrets prompted, bade farewell to his friends with hearty thanks, and retired to his own apartments for the night.

CHAPTER XLII.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS.

Had I but died an hour before this chance,
I'd lived a blessed time; for from this instant
There's nothing serious in mortality.

* * * * *

The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
Are all that's left to brag of.

MACBETH.

LORD Dundee, on reaching his study, would have been only too glad to seek at once a rest he had rarely felt to need so much; but external circumstances and internal agitation conspired to prevent his doing so. A packet of letters, which had been forwarded during the evening, awaited him on the table; he unsealed it, and read them successively with impatient haste, made a few slight notes on each, and threw them aside. He then took up one which he had reserved to the last, smaller, and on finer paper than the others, sealed with a device of a laurel-branch crossed with a rose. That was read also, but not so lightly tossed away; he went through it twice, and smiled—a melancholy smile enough—at the simplicity and fervour of its expressions of affection; and yet, although he loved its gentle writer as sincerely as the most exacting wife could demand, although he had never, even in imagination, swerved from the fidelity which he owed her, although he kissed the paper as he again finished reading it,

and put it away apart from all the rest with a care as lover-like as if she had been there to thank him, the distant image uppermost in his thoughts was not the watcher at lonely Dudhope, but one as loving and as fair, and far more unhappy.

The conviction that Alice Scott was the anonymous author of the billet which, by putting him on his guard against an unavoidable peril, had contributed to preserve his life, had lodged itself in his retentive and vivid fancy, and would neither be modified nor eradicated; it had resisted even the shock caused by the recognition of her brother as one of the conspirators; and of its accuracy the reader is already aware. Only on one point was his mind yet unsettled—the uncertainty of Alice's being informed of Norman's share in the plot; and both the equally-balanced possibilities were likely to present their own peculiar and most painful concomitant circumstances, for, on either presumption, in what a cruel and anomalous dilemma did he stand himself?—forced to choose between casting loose a most determined and relentless enemy, or requiting his generous preserver by allowing the law to take its course; for, dreaded as he now was by the governing party, insulted though he had been when requiring protection from the Convention, he was far too powerful, both in person and by his connections, for such an unblushing and public attempt upon his life to pass unpunished had he chosen to demand the intervention of justice. He was a man of quick decision and singular keenness of perception; nevertheless this difficulty of choosing the best course,

amidst circumstances so entangled and feelings so contending, baffled him just then. He resolved not to discuss it—to remand it until a cooler moment—and applied himself to the re-examination of his new correspondence, to preparing replies, and meditating on their tenor. He might have spared himself any such trouble, for the pre-occupation which he would have eluded mixed itself up in some form with every idea he brought to combat its haunting persistence; the more determinedly he banished it, the more pertinaciously it recurred. The weightiest cares of his responsible position became insignificant trifles, wrapped in an impenetrable mist which blurred their outlines and obliterated all distinctness; while, on the contrary, this new, intrusive problem—clear and pressing—lay under his hand, rose before his eyes, thrust itself between him and his own will, and *must* be dealt with. How, and when, had this black conspiracy come to Alice's knowledge? and why had she bartered away her brother's chance of escape to shield the life of a stranger?

He could not solve it, yet solved it behoved to be; and that—he started as the recollection flashed on him—before day spread abroad the doings of night, and took out of his power the exclusive arbitration of Norman's destiny. If it were indeed a real though most strange truth that Alice had, in perfect ignorance, been the means of delivering her brother into the snare which he had spread for another, he, Claverhouse, would not suffer himself to be outdone in any generosity or gratitude—Norman must be pardoned. And

if to save *him* Alice had done this thing—to save *him*!—what buried dream, what spectre of a past and gone idea, once hatched from his own brain or planted there by another, was that which stood up in his way and bade him go no further?

Perhaps there was something in the irritation of the nerves produced by extreme physical fatigue and by the pain of the injuries received in his severe fall, which worked upon his usually cool and carefully regulated temperament, to excite this morbid condition of mind, in which Alice and all that related to her—every petty shade of meaning in speech, colour, feature, or voice, every possible interpretation that could be put upon her most simple words—assumed an importance utterly disproportionate and fantastic; forcing themselves forward, invincible, obstinate, all-pervading; substituting themselves and the suspicion which they confirmed for every object on which he strove to fix his attention. He threw down the pen, with which during nearly half an hour only he had formed a few almost incoherent sentences, in all the uncontrollable vexation of a man accustomed to the mastery of himself as fully as to the command of others—thwarted, perhaps for the first time.

“Her face looks at me—her eyes reproach me; when she said that he whom she loved would never speak to her again, if she betrayed herself, was it of me she thought? I must and will know the whole truth, or this miserable folly will not leave me a moment’s peace. I suppose I shall be myself again then, which I am not now,” he muttered, half angrily.

"What time can it be? Nearly midnight. Shall I go?"

Reason answered No! Impulse, rarely obeyed by him, but all the more tyrannical when allowed to share its rival's throne, said imperatively Yes!

"I *must*," he repeated between his teeth, with an air of determination, as if he were stamping down some strong internal opposition. "If the thing is to be done at all, and one more chance added to the hundreds which I have sown broadcast against my ever seeing hoar hairs, it must be done without any shilly-shallying."

There was no time to be wasted in altering or arranging his disordered dress; he wrapped himself from head to foot in a large cavalry cloak which entirely concealed his person, pulled from his hat the long, blood-stained plume, in order to leave nothing about his exterior which could distinguish him from the commonest wayfarer, and provided himself with another rapier in the place of that which was glued to the scabbard with the gore of Drummond. He then secured his papers, and left the study, taking the principal staircase to avoid passing through the guard-room. On his way through the large saloon or gallery adjacent to that which he had left he caught sight of his own dark, muffled figure reflected in a mirror, and stopped to examine his disguise. It was complete enough, certainly; yet the very necessity for such precaution seemed to suggest to his abstracted mind the imprudence he was about to commit.

"No one could recognise me thus," was his mental reply to this objection, "and besides, a bullet never

falls twice on the same inch of ground—mine has already done its worst for this once, and luckily proved a spent ball. No, I am resolved to learn the truth of all this!”

No one was in the hall as he crossed it—silence and sleep reigned in the mansion, as, solitary and unguarded, its master issued from it, driven forth by a usurping fancy—to obtain from Alice the assurance that his fears were unfounded—to disprove to himself the existence of a love which had almost brought forth fratricide.

Romance, imagination—call it what you will—the untameable faculty which he had throughout his career so unflinchingly beaten down, was asserting its supremacy now, and, as it ever does, had inverted in its magic mirror the position, form, and value of every established motive and principle of action. On the present occasion he had divested himself without the slightest hesitation of concerns in which the happiness or misery of thousands was involved; and the mind which could grapple with the mightiest interests of kings and nations was concentrating itself, always with the same intense directness of purpose, upon fathoming the causes of a simple woman’s conduct and divining the hidden motions of her heart. It was in every respect a most abnormal state of mind—this sudden and despotic importance thus attained by an apparently trivial incident over innumerable others of a gravity infinitely superior; but, systematically controlled as passion and sensibility had long been in the breast of that man of steel, there are times in all

men's remembrance when some voice is heard within the soul at which the old nature awakes and mutinies, and, breaking loose from its shackles, manifests its vitality in some shape, the more startling the harsher has been its habitual subjection to necessity, will, and custom.

Lord Dundee was traversing one of these crises; and, could he have been clearly read at that minute by the friends who only knew him as his ordinary self—the man of war, of council, or even of social intercourse, who never suffered to appear in any word or habit of his daily existence the wild spirit of romance which animated the main course of his adventurous life—they would have been inclined to deny his identity or his sanity. The rain, which had begun to fall during the last hour, was pouring down in one continuous sheet; the wind, which had gradually risen to a perfect hurricane, swept it along in drenching showers—he could scarcely keep his footing; yet he never slackened his pace, but hurried on—bent, as steadily as if the destiny of an empire had depended upon it, on investigating the mystery which hung round the relative situations of Norman and Alice towards himself. There was a sting more galling than he would have admitted to any living soul in the thought that Alice—pious, high-minded, and virtuous as he had believed her—should have allowed herself to be betrayed by any mistaken apprehension of his feelings into the miserable error to which all his reminiscences pointed, when viewed in the light of this new possibility; still less could he endure to suppose that she should have

been so perverted by this vain and reprehensible passion as to have stifled at its command the natural promptings of a sister's heart. And yet, answered his own, had she not interposed, he had been assuredly butchered, without defence or resistance, like a dumb beast in the shambles, as his faithful servant had been in his stead—Alice had acted the part of his guardian angel; and *he* must shed her brother's blood, or by foregoing the claims of just vengeance lay a doubly dangerous train of consequences against his own future safety.

“Now, to strike the flint on steel! Light must spring forth; but, show what it will, the revelation on both parts cannot fail to be a trying one for her. And if too, as I fear——Poor girl, poor girl!”

Repeating this, half mechanically, to himself, he stopped at the house and (sound most disagreeable to its quiet inhabitants) applied his summons for admission, without bestowing the most remote consideration upon the unseasonableness of the proceeding.

Such a summons was quite enough, at a period so disturbed, to bring from her bed, half dressed and wholly frightened, the fellow-lodger who had volunteered to fill Janet Rutherford's post during her short absence. This person, the mother of the little girl whom Alice had nursed during the winter, deliberated within herself, as she crept down from the fourth story, lamp in hand, upon the expediency of refusing admittance to the intruder, unless (which to her fluttered nerves suggested itself in terrific colours) he proved to be some agent of government, some inquisitorial func-

tionary sent to disturb the respectable repose of the dwelling by a search for some political offender.

She drew a ponderous chain across the door, and peeped out. The obscurity was too great to allow her to discern anything, and a gust of wind and rain, which engulfed itself in the passage, nearly extinguished the light, and compelled her, by reason of the unfinished adjustment of her toilet, to take shelter behind the door.

"I want to see Mistress Alice Scott, who, I know, lives here," said the viscount, advancing as far as the barrier allowed.

"Wha are ye?" asked Mrs. Morison, in a very quaking voice.

"No matter for that. Let me in, I request, and call Mistress Alice."

"Ye maun come back the morn—and that's the Sabbath—if ye need to get speech o' Alice, for that's what canna come to pass the night," replied the woman. "This is nae hour for honest lassies to be haudin' cracks wi' stranger men; she's her lane here, and I winna let ye in, nor call her neither—and that's flat!"

"It is very evident that you do not know who addresses you, my good woman," said the viscount's deliberate voice. "I should be loth to command compliance, but I shall be forced to resort to authority if civility fail."

"I humbly crave yer pardon, sir; ye suld ha' said that ye were ane having authority. I'll unbar the yett for ye," answered the matron, quite satisfied that her

interlocutor was some member of that staff of officials who possessed and exercised the right of entering any house, from the nobleman's mansion to the cottar's hut, if any stigma of disaffection or resetting of disaffected persons had fallen upon its unlucky inmates. It is to be observed, however, that such investigations (extremely common during those years of civil war and universal plotting) were invariably conducted with more of legal form and ceremony than the visit of a single individual, and that their frequency and severity had very much abated since the subversion of Jacobite rule, and the advent to power of that party to whose suppression these despotic measures were chiefly directed. It was not likely, however, that Mistress Morison, in her trepidation, would consider these pros and cons; in fact, she had witnessed so many invasions of a similar kind that her fears were quite excusable.

"Ou, dearie me! what's comin' to us a'?" she sighed, fully prepared to see the insignia of a macer of council emerge from the pitchy darkness, or to be exposed to the insults of three or four rough soldiers empowered by warrant to seize, bind, and drag away into captivity the unfortunate object of their mission. Who that might be she could not guess, unless it were Norman Scott, whose connections and doctrines were pretty well known to her, and whom she remembered to have met mounting to his sister's apartments late that evening.

Lord Dundee stepped into the corridor as the chain

was unhooked, and, taking the door from the woman's hand, shut it himself.

"Now show me to some room where I can be private, and tell Mistress Alice that a visitor entreats her to grant him some conversation——No—say nothing, except that I wish to see her."

"What can ye hae to say to the lassie? What harm can she ha' dune, puir lamb?" asked Mrs. Morison, who thought it her bounden duty to stand on the defensive to the last gasp, especially since she had learnt that Alice was the party concerned in this ominous invasion of their tranquillity.

"The devil, woman!" exclaimed Lord Dundee, exasperated at the querulous fretfulness with which she vented these not unreasonable remonstrances, "do you think I am going to murder her? or that if I were I should be put off my purpose by your foolery? I have not come hither to chaffer question and answer with a whining gossip, but on business which would make every hair of your head stand on end—and it will be as well for you to trouble your wits no further anent my concerns than is needful to do my bidding. Do you understand?"

"Ay, sir—ay, sir," responded Mrs. Morison submissively, for during this sharp rebuke, curiously indicative of the speaker's unwonted irascibility, she had come to the decision that it was best for her not to try conclusions with a man of rank more exalted than the petty myrmidons of military or civil tyranny with whom she had expected to find herself confronted.

His dress was entirely hidden—the skirt of his cloak, thrown in a broad fold over the left shoulder, covered the lower half of his face, and slightly smothered his voice, while the deep brim of his large sombrero almost met it from above; but the small portion exposed to view was smooth and fair—the hand which held his cloak together was long, slight, and white—the lace at the wrist was rich and fine—the jewel on his finger flashed and shone as it moved—and the luxuriant masses of curled hair, although soaked with rain, matted, and disordered, were yet at that day too exclusive signs of wealth and station to be misread by any one.

Much overawed, the woman introduced him into the little sanctum of Janet Rutherford, which opened close by. She placed her small iron cresset lamp upon the table, and asked him to wait there, promising to send Alice as quickly as possible.

“I am here, who asks for me?” said a voice behind him, very low and sweet, but cold and toneless as despair; and Alice stood in the room.

Roused by the loud and untimely summons below, not from sleep, which had deserted her eyelids—which she had not even sought—but from her unceasing and distracted prayers, she had obeyed the first intimation of her frightened neighbour, and, deaf to all explanation of the impossibility of excluding the supposed official visitor, had glided down the stairs and into the room so swiftly and lightly that she had entered before he had even had time to consider in what language or with what precautions to soften the double disclo-

sure he held suspended over her. She had stopped just within the door, her black dress barely distinguishable from the gloom around, her arms drooping, her hands folded before her, her eyes cast down, her rich shining ringlets pushed back from the snowy brow, as if to free it from their weight and warmth, and clustering behind the delicate ears and madonna face like a shadowy aureole—more beautiful than he had ever seen her, more mournful and careworn than he could well bear to see, knowing on what an errand he had come. Yet strange! she did not advance nor look up—for whom could she take him?

“Alice! what is this? have you forgotten me?”

He held out his hand to her, throwing at the same time upon the table the hat he had forgotten to remove. She had been waiting as a criminal waits for the fall of the axe to be told that *he* had perished, and oh, marvel of marvels! ecstasy beyond words! he was safe, he was there, living, unhurt! She flew to him, gazed full into his eyes, as if the evidence of *one* sense alone were too weak to render such bliss credible—her sweet face transfigured by a glory of love and happiness—then resting both hands upon his arm she hid it upon them and wept—wept like a child, profusely, unrestrainedly—all reserve, all respect forgotten—shaking like an aspen leaf as the delicious tears burst forth.

He made no attempt to check them, but drew her closer to his side, and let her shed them there, for the first and last time; gazing down with a pity which shook his resolve upon the frail, girlish form

so ill-fitted to bear such rude trials; and in sad anticipation of the change which in so few minutes would transform those tender streams of womanly relief into tears of blood, drawn from a strong heart by the knowledge of her brother's crime—and, alas! it was but too clear! her own hopeless and hapless love.

Gradually Alice grew more composed, and, in confusion at the want of respect into which her feelings had led her, drew herself gently away, but still kept her eyes fixed upon him—those lucid, tender, modest eyes, all suffused still with joyous tears, but which spoke more plainly than they had ever dared to do, what he was to her, and how intense her sufferings had been.

“Alice, dear child, do not waste such emotion on me. I do not need it, and am come to thank you.”

“What thanks can be due from my benefactor to me?” murmured Alice, with a smile which shone through the tokens of her grief as a rainbow gilds a cloud. “As for these silly tears, they are only shed for sorrow that the life I owe to Lord Dundee cannot be spent for him.”

Lord Dundee dropped the hand which lay so willingly in his, while the close pressure of the lips and the sudden heaviness and darkening of the eye told a tale of inward strife. He feared—the expression is not an exaggerated one—he had an unreasoning, unconquerable, unmanly shrinking from the task of casting away the affection of this gentle, beautiful creature—he had so few to love, so few who loved

him for himself! He had sunned his chilled and haughty nature in its genial warmth without ever inquiring into its consequences to her or assigning to it any well-defined name in his own mind. He knew perfectly well that in the ordinary sense of the word he did not *love* Alice—that he had no interest in her which he would have been reluctant to confess before the whole world—on this all-important point his conscience gave no feeble or wavering response—and, content with that, he had accepted and encouraged the young girl's humble yet fervent attachment, thinking himself safe because he did not love her, thinking her secure because she loved another—transferring to the unknown and imaginary beloved every involuntary betrayal of herself which ought to have opened his eyes to the reality—and caring no more to analyse that attachment than a traveller journeying through a waste of ice (to which his inner world might in many respects be likened) would care to examine from what tree the wood was cut which hospitable hands might kindle to thaw his benumbed limbs, or than a pilgrim parched with drought would ask the name of a river before drinking of its limpid waters. He had loved Alice—the fond, grateful girl-friend, with her trusting eyes and perfect faith, whom chance had thrown so utterly upon his tenderness and his honour—as prisoners have been known to prize a slender plant which has pushed its pale leaves and odorous buds between the crevices of their dungeon pavement; he had plucked the blossom of her love as it were from a stony ground, where none such

had ever flowered for him before; he had bent again and again to inhale its pure and abundant fragrance, sweeter than ever by contrast with the wrangling and din, the gross selfishness and evil of every sort amongst which he had cast his lot; and now he rebelled passionately against the implacable fate which had found this unshielded place beneath the triple bronze, and planted in his breast a friendship so deep and ennobling only to bid him abandon it for ever. He turned upon this harsh destiny, he fought with it—demanding fiercely why *he* should be forbidden by conscience to do as other men, and take the love so freely offered—why he should have no liberty—but he hedged in, and driven to immolate every weakness at the shrine of this grim Moloch, Duty—and what curse he carried about with him which withered up all the beauty and gladness of life when he sought to take his share in it? No—this he *would* keep—this heart he had so fairly won; she loved him, let her love on; he would not be the one to crush it. If she must learn his marriage, let her learn it from other lips when he was far away, too far to hear her agonized reproaches. No falsehood was needed, merely silence and concealment of the truth; why should he uselessly torture her now that the mischief was done?

And—humbling proof of the corruption of our human nature on the very side we proudly deem invulnerable—this self-indulgent, shallow sophistry—this temptation, seen all the while in its true light, abhorred by his better self, was a real and fearful one!

For a moment only, to be discarded the next amidst

a rush of such self-reproach as he had rarely or never inflicted upon himself before. He, who had not even the poor excuse of passion to plead in extenuation of such deception—he, to connive at so fatal a delusion! and in the moral cowardice of wishing to spare himself the sight of her affliction, and her the grief of knowing that he was beyond all love save that of a sister or a daughter, embark upon a career of deliberate though tacit falsehood, of which it was impossible to see the end—lead her on with a lie in his right hand, perhaps to find himself at last involved in a labyrinth where he might lose his honour and self-respect—Alice her innocence and her peace!—With an exertion of the will as sudden and imperious as an effort of the body, he trampled down the base, pernicious thought, and trod it in the dust.

“Now out upon thee, false knight and recreant gentleman!” he said in his heart. “Is this thy vaunted courage, to quail before the sight of a woman’s tears? is this thy stainless honour, to wile away that of one who loves thee, and give her by thy ungenerous weakness cause for sorrow more hopeless than ever hereafter? What devil has been tempting me to-night? Am I a dog that I should do this thing?”

“Alas! I have offended you, my lord,” said Alice, for his long silence, and the cold, serious countenance with which he had let her hand fall from his, had chased away all the sunny gleam from her brow, and the rose from her glowing cheek.

“*You* offend me Alice!—I am but too deeply indebted to you—Heaven grant that before this inter-

view is ended you may not tell me that you hate me. Whatever claim you may conceive me to have upon your gratitude, I never could have dared to ask from you one-tenth of the sacrifice you must have made for me."

"I do not understand ——" she said, wonderingly, the tears which still stole down her face ceasing, as if some sudden shock had closed the spring within. "A sacrifice? I made none—and oh! God has been very merciful, and I very faithless! I despaired of his goodness, I could not believe that you would be saved; but He has not put *that* great burden on His poor trembling servant, and how can I fear what else may happen unto me?"

"Alice, you are a brave, patient girl, and you will need all your firmness. There is worse coming than you seem to guess. My poor child, am I to understand that when you wrote that warning—ah! you do not deny it—you entertained no idea that you had a deeper interest in its contents than a stranger's welfare?"

"A stranger! am I a stranger to you, or you to me?" murmured poor Alice—the expression cut her to the heart.

"A stranger certainly, except in friendship—and one would fain be more so," he thought, as he reflected upon what he was about to speak. "But, Alice, answer me at once, for this dark doubt of you has grievously pained me. How did you become mistress of the intelligence you sent to me, without being also aware——"

"Say on, I can bear any thing from you," she answered faintly.

His language was an enigma as yet, but her fine instinct gave warning of some new calamity, and, like the sensitive plants which close their petals when a storm draws nigh, she felt the coming blow even before it reached her.

“Did you recognise my assassins? Did you not surmise how dreadful a share you had in their crime and its reward? Alice, Alice! what am I to think? Was the name of one at least never spoken in your hearing? did no voice of nature whisper to you whom you were betraying?”

Her large hazel eyes had grown quite fixed, and dilated almost to circles; she shrank into herself, raising her small quivering hands to her head, as if to exclude the sounds from her brain, and exclaimed in a low, horror-struck whisper,

“Norman, oh Norman! it is come—all is fulfilled now! say no more—I *know* ——”

“Thrice this night his sword has missed my heart, my blood is still wet on it; but my time is not yet at hand, and until my hour hath struck man’s enmity is vain. He is now my prisoner, and when to-morrow dawns ——”

She heard no more; she had wavered and tottered as the flame of a taper shivers in a blast of wind, and his arm was extended to sustain her—but, true to herself even at that appalling moment, she neither shrieked nor wept, but ere he could prevent her was on the ground at his feet, clasping his knees, kissing his hands, burying her face in the folds of his cloak, supplicating in words that might have melted a rock, with gestures

of wild entreaty, for the pardon of her wretched brother.

Vainly did Lord Dundee try to soothe her—vainly did he strive to assure her of his intentions; she would not listen nor comprehend in her tumult of anguish, in her shame for Norman's guilt, to which Lord Dundee's unsolicited clemency on a former occasion gave a tenfold sting, if it could not impart a blacker dye, and, goaded on by one dread peculiar to herself, which, sharpening her horror of his vengeance to the last intensity, sprang from her lips, mingling her solicitations for a brother's life with the confession of her fated love.

“ Oh, Lord Dundee, have mercy on him, have mercy on him! he has sinned against you, but leave him time to repent for his sin against Heaven! Be pitiful as you hope for pity, spare if you would be spared, and for vengeance heap those coals of fire upon his head! Hear me, befriend me, if not for his sake, for mine—that I may not loathe my own life because I can never dare to love you more! See, I will kneel here until my knees grow to the earth, I will hold you until you strike me from you, I will cry until you are weary, for if he has hated I have loved you, with a love that might atone for his worst guilt!”

He shaded his averted face with unsteady hand—he could not look at her. She sank together almost insensible, as his unmoved manner, in which she could not discern the agitation caused by her own words, seemed to bid her leave all hope behind, but, recover-

ing herself instantly, exclaimed with redoubled vehemence,

“No, no! you will not be cruel; you will not be inhuman; you will not ruin the noble image of all generous goodness enthroned in my innermost soul; you will not tear from me the right to love you, the happiness of praying for you as I have never ceased to do! Oh dinna turn so coldly away—dinna seek to harden your heart against the orphan who has none but you to help her! If you have on your soul one burden of grief, one load of remorse, one memory of evil done which you would gladly undo, grant me now my despairing petition, and your forgiveness of another’s crime shall return as a messenger of joy to your own bosom, such joy as vengeance never could bring! But if justice must be satisfied, if the forfeit must be paid, blood for blood, life for life, take mine, and be merciful even in that—for dying so I shall escape the agony of hating you, far worse than the bitterest death! No, you need not raise a finger to harm me—speak the word which sends my brother unrepentant and unforgiven to a murderer’s doom, slay by that awful sentence the love which fills my heart of hearts, and Alice will never reproach you, for that heart will break!”

“Rise, rise, Alice—rise, my poor child, I cannot see you so,” said Lord Dundee, his voice tremulous with genuine emotion, and trying gently to lift her—“you cannot think how much you are distressing me by such abasement.”

“My soul is bowed to the dust with the remorse he will never feel; my attitude is but too fit a one. Leave

me here, my lord, at least until I have won the word of pardon from your generous lips, and paid my tribute of thankfulness for mercy undeserved by him for whom I implore it. Let the sister's humiliation and tears efface the brother's crime."

She had resisted all his efforts to raise her, and, clinging fast to him, cast up her eyes to watch for the relenting of his stern, mournful, face. It came with her last words, and his, mingling with them, sadly rejected all claim to that enthusiastic gratitude.

"Alice, I will not pretend to a generosity which, but for you, I never should have exercised. I never should have dreamed of such leniency as pardoning and releasing your brother, had your affectionate friendship not contributed to save my life, or striven to do so as far as your power could extend. I had resolved on this, even before I came hither, but only for your sake, and lest I might add a straw's weight to your sore burden. But with his life, I frankly tell you, Alice, I have given you my own. Nothing but my death will ever appease his wanton hatred, and my forgiveness will but add fuel to flame—malignity to his detestation."

"Oh! never, never! Wild, perverted he is, alas! but not so utterly base! He could never injure you more; a fiend would blush at such vile, hateful, ingratitude!" ejaculated Alice; and, gathering the viscount's hands to her bosom, she folded them in her own, laid her hot cheek upon them, pressed them to her lips with all the enthusiasm of her adoring thankfulness; then rose and stood before him, trembling with the

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violence of her agitation. And that she believed him free as herself, he knew now as certainly as that she loved him. Innocence, most heavenly and unsullied, shone in her every act and look—the innocence on which a passion condemned by man, unblessed by Heaven, could have no hold.

“Alice, I have more to say—more to tell you—to confess to you——” He struggled through these sentences, then failed. How was it that he—the ready, accomplished, eloquent, speaker to all men and women he had ever met, should be at such a loss in this emergency?

“Alice,” he began afresh, “the first time we met, I asked, at this hour, on this very night, almost in this very place, that you would lend no ear to the calumnies that are spread abroad against me, and, remembering that I had tried to be a friend to you, think kindly of me in turn.”

“Heaven knows I kept my word, and, oh, too well!” said the poor girl in broken accents.

“Too well, indeed, for your own happiness, I sadly fear; too well, perhaps, for mine. Nay, my child, I do not mean that I love you; do not think, do not *hope* such a thing—it would be too great a misfortune for both—unfeeling, insolent as I may seem in saying it so plainly; but duty commands, and I obey her dictates now as ever. Alice, I cannot tell you, I knew not myself, until I was doomed to lose it, how green a spot your regard has been in my wild and wearing life; but I must give up that, and your gratitude, and your unselfish love, were they what they *could* not be

—ten thousand times more precious—and bid you forget that ever I asked them of you, that ever I did anything which might seem to justify them—to forget me.”

Overwhelmed by the consciousness that her secret had irrevocably rushed from her unguarded lips, Alice had buried her face in her arms; a scarlet flame flushing over cheek, neck, and bosom, to the very tips of her slender fingers; the clear, full, stream of her abounding love which had long run so calm and deep, had suddenly, swollen by the recent tempest, risen into a furious torrent and overflowed its quiet banks, leaving utter confusion behind. But, gradually, as the voice of him she loved sank like a gale from heaven over the surgings of her trembling shame, the thought that he had heard and understood, and had not spurned her in contemptuous anger, nay, that his pitying respect enfolded her still in undiminished gentleness, gave her the only comfort she desired or could receive. She lifted her eyes to his, and, folding her small hands firmly together, said, as a martyr might refuse to abjure his creed,

“I cannot; and I would not if I could. I am lowly in your sight, and in my own; my love may be presumptuous and vain, but it is the last treasure I possess, and none shall take it from me. It is mine, my very own—bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh; it cannot grieve you; leave it me in peace; even without one ray of hope, I can still be happy.”

“Alice, you must not indulge even that affection. I cannot conceive how you can have remained in this

extraordinary ignorance. I certainly am guiltless of tampering with your affections ——”

“You are, you are! but love springs to life in your smile, and speaks with your voice; and I, weak woman that I am! waited not to be sought,” replied Alice, with deep and bitter earnestness. “My lord, I ask no charity for myself, if I have transgressed all bounds of maiden modesty—alas! it may be so, I know not——” tears choked her speech, “but I *must* be true to my own conscience. I dare not make a promise I cannot keep; I dare not feign a shame I cannot feel.”

She was no longer the meek, broken-spirited, girl, shrinking from blame or shadow of reproach; her woman’s heart had grown strong within her, unshaken in the fearless sanctity of her guileless truth, unshaken in her trust in his chivalrous honour.

“I said once in my haste, that if ever you guessed my love you would despise me. I thank Heaven that I have so greatly erred, for I know that you do not quite condemn me; that Lord Dundee, the high-souled gentleman, would never expose the name of a helpless girl to the jests and mockery of the world for the crime of loving him; nor bestow on her one glance of scorn because she has avowed it. I never dreamed that you *could* love me; I have lost nothing, nay, I am doubly rich, now that I have a double right of esteeming you above all earthly beings, and of praying for you every hour of my future life. You have given it to me, but you cannot take it back.”

“Coward!” muttered Lord Dundee to himself,

"how long wilt thou hold the sword over this defenceless head?"

"Yes, Alice, I can. I have no more power to give that right than you to receive it. I have not the courage to bid you banish every vestige of our friendship from your mind, but, if you have ever nourished for me one single thought more warm than that which a daughter might bear to a parent, a friend to a friend, cast it forth as an adder which will one day sting you to the heart's core. Think of Dundee, sometimes; join his name to your pure prayers; but think of him only as an outlawed, ruined, man, bound on a journey whence he will never return alive; as one who will not cross your path again—who most bitterly regrets that ever he crossed it to your sorrow; and, Alice, *never* else."

"As my guardian, my friend, my benefactor, my *all*; to the last moment of my existence, on my dying bed, beyond the grave itself; while God, who gave into my heart the deep love I bear you, shall grant me sense and memory to cherish it!" she answered in a low voice, but with a passionate tenderness which wrung his heart to hear.

"Oh, Alice, why will you not understand what else I *must* speak? No love can live between us. I cannot accept—you must not offer it. Alice . . . I am married."

A voice, not hers—not like any human articulation, repeated in a faint, hollow echo—

"Married!"

"Long ago—years before we met. I love my wife."

You might have seen that brave man's heart beat; you might almost have heard its loud, distinct throbs in the silence which ensued—that audible silence which thrills upon the nerves like the hush round some supernatural presence—if the foe he had that evening slain had arisen to confront him he would have been less awed—for never did human face upon which the stillness of annihilation had once descended show to living eye an expression so ghastly as the dull blank of that countenance from which thought, sense, and feeling had been struck out at once. She did not utter a sound—*her* heart had not moved, it was as lead in her breast—her eyes were distended and mindless—her lips grey and stiff—she breathed—she stood upright—but as far as sight, hearing, motion, and reason were concerned, she was for those moments *dead*—mute, frozen into stone, by the horror of great darkness which had fallen upon her.

He tried to unclasp the rigid, marble-cold hands, locked together with the tenacity of despair, but at the first contact of his soft, caressing fingers, whose touch spoke so eloquently the compassion his tongue lacked power to convey, an electric convulsion darted through every limb—woke soul and sense; she shuddered away from him, and with a low, prolonged cry like the wail of a lost spirit for its Eden, crouched together, as if she had been too mean and vile to see the light, and were calling to the earth to hide her.

“ Oh God, that I had never seen, never heard, never known you! Oh God! that I had died that night, that I could die now!”

“What great and unpardonable crime have I committed that I should be compelled to do and see this?” thought Lord Dundee, with unspeakable bitterness, as he looked helplessly on. Fain would he have comforted—but what consolation that he could have offered would have been aught but an empty mockery? Uncompromising duty, undeviating rectitude, had unsealed his lips and placed the dagger in his hand—the thrust had gone too truly home—he had no power to draw the weapon back—and must perforce stand by to behold the throes of the stricken deer, with the death-barb quivering in her side. The stern soldier, inured to every type and shade of misery, thought that he had never known or seen wretchedness until now.

“No, Alice—no, my poor child, say not so, you are too young to know despair—too young to know love. You have dreamed in the solitary musings of your guileless soul, and created for yourself the image you have worshipped, believing that love which was but its reflection and its presage. Wait patiently until the shock of this discovery has passed away, and you will know me as I am—a worldly, ambitious man, hardened by perpetual strife with all that is most coarse and hardening in this warfare of existence—unworthy to gain, had I ever been free to seek, such angelic affection. You will not wish to die when I am forgotten, and long years of joy and mutual love are opening freshly before you.”

“I will not have time to wish for it—I have my death-stroke,” she said, laying her right hand on her

breast, and casting round her a wandering, searching glance, moaning in faint long-drawn gasps as if the strangled breath would barely come. "My heart is broken—my eyes are dim—the life is gone from me. Oh my shame, my shame!"

"Ah never, Alice! never could it come nigh one so pure as thee! Sorrow, suffering, have come—delusion, blindness, fatality, all have been leagued against thy happiness; but not shame, not shame, sweet Alice!"

"Shame in my own sight—remorse before Heaven," she exclaimed with wild energy, "for I have sinned, and my sin has found me out! Oh, was that Heaven itself sworn against me, that this was always hidden from me, to crush me so at last!"

Her white lips seemed to refuse their service, as, rocking herself to and fro, like one in some intolerable bodily pain, she leaned against the dark pillar of the chimney, and no sound came from those still parted lips but the heavy, tearless sobs which revealed the agony of a heart they could not relieve—while the viscount pondered on the extraordinary and miserable fatality which could have kept Alice in such profound ignorance of a fact so generally known as his marriage.

"My kinsfolk, my cousin Glencarrig, is it possible that they never informed you, never tried to enlighten you on this subject? ——"

"They never knew my love—no human creature knew. Why should I accuse them? On me alone be the reproach and the punishment, for I am an idolater—for I love you not as women love in this world, but as a Christian worships his God—as

I once deceived my vain heart that I worshipped mine, when it was yours—yours alone, undivided and entire! Yours since the night you protected and sheltered me—yours since the first beam your eyes shed into my child's soul, and taught me what it was to adore the very trace of your footsteps on the ground, to envy the meanest senseless things your hand had touched, to live my full life only in the air you breathe, to have no happiness in this world, and, impious that I am! no hope in another, but your presence! And while I hear your voice, while I gaze upon your face, while that presence is near me, I cannot choose but love—I cannot wish to love you less—I cannot, I *cannot* repent! I dare not pray to forget lest I should be smitten dead for my hypocrisy. Depart, leave me at once, lest in my bitter misery I speak that which no penitence can wipe out, and curse the day I was born! Go, for pity's sake!" she implored, in a tone of which no pen could paint the unearthly plaintive pathos, "and may Heaven in its great mercy never let us meet again, that ere I die I may learn to pray that the thought of my heart may be forgiven me!"

His haughty features were pale and restless with pain, the choking spasm of the throat, so long unfelt, half stifled him—and tears, blessed pitiful tears, forgotten since early boyhood, moistened his dark eyes; the rock had been struck, the waters were gushing forth, all the man's stern stoicism melted away beneath one breath of this real and passionate appeal to all that forms at once the weakness and the glory of our nature.

In vain he reiterated to himself that he had done only what plainest right and honour bade him; the conviction, unanswerable as it was, brought no solace with it. Genius, eloquence, renown—what was their value now, since they could not help to pour one drop of balm upon her wounded spirit?—and for the first time in his life that proud and truthful man envied those who could have told a sweet, comforting lie.

“ Alice, my poor, poor girl! be calm. For my sake, Alice!”

Oh, great might and mystery of a woman’s love, into which angels might desire to look! By what power did she rise above herself and find strength in her veriest weakness? The beseeching accents of the strong man brought low could reach her even in the darkest abyss of her despair, and restore, if only for a brief space, the reason which seemed tottering on the verge of distraction.

“ I *am* calm—see! I am not weeping! I will not grieve you; I never did yet,” she said, with an effort to smile, so dreadful that it haunted him for days—“ You must go away—you must not stay with me—it would be wrong,” and she looked round the dark room and into his bending, agitated face with eyes which saw nothing. He took her hand in his, she did not withdraw it, nor even seem to feel that he held it, and thus they remained by the yellow flickering lamp-light, canopied by the murky, fantastic shadows which it cast on every spot save that motionless group; hanging around and over them like the forecast gloom of their swift following fate.

Minute after minute crept on in this dumb suspense, this little pause between the Past and Future—the narrow rift which, once stepped over, must widen into an impassable chasm, across which they might behold each other, but never tread to stand side by side again. Slowly the midnight chimes tolled out the twelve strokes, and the viscount, scarcely able to subdue his emotion, said,

“We must indeed part, each to our own appointed destiny. I go with open eyes and undaunted heart to meet my own; but Alice, my child—let me for this last time call you so—my beloved child, how, young and tender as you are, can I leave you to yours? Pray for me, Alice, as you promised to do, and if ever in my selfish blindness I have given your patient, gentle heart one pang, forgive it me as you would by the couch of a dying enemy, for I have truly been your worst foe even when I most sincerely wished to serve you.”

He thought she had been going to reply, but she only looked at him with an expression of heart-rending entreaty; in all other respects she seemed stupified.

“Farewell, farewell—I must and will hope to meet in happier times—Adieu, Alice, adieu—” he murmured again and again, as if no repetition could exhaust the bitterness of that word, “and hear me vow to you ere I go, that while John Grahame draws the breath of life, no name, not even hers whose sister you are worthy to have been, shall be remembered by him with more tenderness, no memory held in more religious reverence and affection, than that of one who so generously, undeservedly loved him!”

He pressed her hands with painful force, and tore himself away, for what could any longer delay profit either?—but an impulse stronger than any conventionality of prudence—a longing which would have carried him over red-hot ploughshares, brought him back to her side. He took the yielding figure in his arms, he folded it in his embrace as a father might soothe a dearly loved and grieving child, he called her by every fond name that manly pity could suggest, he kissed the colourless cheek, the tense, damp brow, his warm lips clung to her cold, ashy mouth—but caresses which an hour before would have quickened her from the gates of the grave were powerless now as empty air, and there was that written on her face which made him shudder strangely as he placed her on a low seat and left her there alone.

For ever!—The door which closed behind his retreating steps could not have divided them more surely had it set the width of a hemisphere between them; and, if in those last kisses lurked one taint of aught that might make an angel blush, the stain of earth was surely washed away in the drops that fell where their traces rested—his tears, not hers—she had none left to shed.

The howling wind, the cutting hail and drifting sleet, dashed furiously against him—they were almost welcome, so well did they accord with the tumultuous sensations which tossed within him; for he was questioning angrily with himself, as men will do who see the issues of Providence through the medium of their own finite wisdom, why here below such wretched-

ness should be set apart for the innocent. But, deeply as he grieved for Alice, much as he lamented the many occasions on which his unreflecting kindness had fostered and fed the mischief which he had only perceived too late, he had no misgivings but what time, absence, and, best remedy of all, the positive assurance of his marriage, would soon effect a cure. He obliged himself to believe this, and count upon it as a certainty—although it was impossible to forget the face which told another tale, and which was ever in his mind's eye, turn where he would.

Thus, plunged in his melancholy and entangled musings, he went home a sadder, and perhaps a better, man from that house of mourning, not once anticipating that by his release of Norman he was but forcing her to wring out the very dregs of a chalice which she had drained to the last drop.

And Alice—what of her?

She had slowly risen with outstretched arms, then sunk, kneeling, on the spot which *he* had filled whose coming would never more bring Paradise to her aching heart, whose voice would never more be as music to her yearning ear, whose very memory was now become a sin; and, lower, lower, as each billow of the great water-flood closed over her head—not insensible, that would have been too unhopèd-for a mercy, but sentient and conscious, her thin, white hands twined in her torn and scattered tresses—burning brow and panting bosom dashed on the pitiless stones, less pitiless than her fate; for heaven seemed of brass above and earth of iron beneath; and there was no pleasure in life, no

rest in death; and, in the ghostly stillness of those dark hours, the cry, the last desperate cry of a crushed and bleeding heart, went shuddering up to the ear of Eternal Pity,

“ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? ”

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CHAPTER XLIII.

"BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER."

But ask not, hope not, one relenting thought
From him who doomed thee thus to waste away,
Whose heart with sullen, speechless vengeance fraught
Broods in dark triumph. THE MARENNA.

THE riot of the elements subsided with the approach of dawn, and the Sabbath morn broke over city and country, fresh, still, and bright, scattering repose and beauty wherever the rosy radiance fell; but that cheering calm which succeeds to the agitation and strife of nature is no type of the calm of despair which broods over the human heart when the raging tornado of passion has done its worst, and nothing is left to destroy.

In such a stupor of misery, fast verging to madness, Alice was sitting or cowering in the chimney-corner of her own chamber, unconscious of how she had crawled thither, or that her neighbour, who had found her, as we have described, in Janet's room, had entreated to be allowed to stay with her, and had been harshly, passionately, driven away. The girl's arms were crossed, and fell over her knees—her head was completely sunk in them—her long hair streaming round her; and, huddled together, hating the light, hating herself, shrouded in the veil of her misery, she had sat and was sitting still.

Not alone though. Near her, with knitted brow and threatening look, stood Norman—the undutiful son, the heartless brother, the perverter of holiest things to most abhorred ends, who had returned, freshly pardoned by the adversary whose destruction he had sworn to compass, to trample upon his sister in her wretchedness, and, deluded by his own dark imaginings, erect himself into a judge over her whose whole daily life and conversation were a witness against him. Exasperated beyond all bounds at the failure of his attempt upon Lord Dundee—goaded still further by the careless disregard of his utmost hostility which could dictate that nobleman’s liberation of him—disappointed in his fanatical desire either to slay the most dangerous opponent of all he venerated, or gain by a public trial and execution the renown of ranking with those whom thousands revered as martyrs—the violent passions which could no longer vent themselves in deeds had burst forth in an insulting defiance of his enemy’s power, a refusal of his clemency, and a challenge to him to do his worst. The refusal was set aside, the defiance heard with a smile of ineffable disdain; and Norman, craving a death continually denied to his insatiable self-righteousness, was expelled from the house which he had hoped was to become an antechamber to the scene of his self-glorification, as a thing unfit even to be feared, thrown away as one might pluck off an insignificant insect without even caring to set one’s foot upon it—a clemency hateful to him from any man, but from Claverhouse an outrage, a degradation, a source of

more deadly abhorrence, never to be cancelled or expiated.

“Thou art only a reptile,” were Lord Dundee’s last words to him; “but a loathsome one enough, whose neck I might have wrung, to deliver the world from thy noxious existence; but there is one who bears thy name, whose life was drawn from the same fountain which gave thee thine—I will not destroy it for the promise I made to her—for her sake do I refrain from closing my hand and breaking thee to powder, although assuredly some devil in man’s shape was placed in thy cradle instead of her brother.”

Armed by the belief engendered in his mind by these hasty and imprudent sentences, he now charged her with the disgraceful attachment which to his fancy they implied; and, justifiable, legitimate, nay honourable, as that anger would have been if righteously merited and christianly shown, his was neither the temper nor the creed in which it could escape from becoming what it then was.

“Miserable girl!” he exclaimed fiercely, when he found his reviling unheeded, his taunts unanswered, “dost thou hear me? art thou so steeped to the lips in thy infamy that thou despisest my anger? Rise and kneel down, strew ashes on thy degraded head, gird thyself with sackcloth, and do penance in the spirit before me, ere thou show thyself before the eyes of the congregation! Obey me, I say! stand up and answer for thyself!”

He dragged her up with such unmanly violence that a little more and the slight bone must have

snapped under his iron grasp. The pain must have been exquisite, but she only gave vent to a suppressed moan, and looked reproachfully at him.

"Art thou stricken dumb?" he asked, for she had made no more reply to this adjuration than to all the rest. "Come, have done with this pretty hypocritical shyness, cast off thy sweet maidenly shamefacedness, or I swear that I will have thy confession torn from thee with scourges!"

"My confession?" She said it after him twice or thrice, like a child conning a wearisome lesson.

"Ay—thy confession, wanton! Thy confession, degenerate daughter of a degenerate and lukewarm father! Who was with thee last night—who stole hither like a thief? Who bargained for the sister's honour? What ransom was paid for the brother's life?"

The name which he hurled on her from between his gnashing teeth was one which, innocent, would have fired every womanly instinct into reckless defiance of his wrath—which, guilty, would have bowed her to the dust to hide her ignominy as she might. But Alice only uttered a delirious half-laugh, that made his hair bristle, and said carelessly,

"That's false, brother! and you ken it—none better."

Horror! Was she distraught—insane? or was this only the artful playing of a part to defeat him, and escape the public exposure, the open atonement for her supposed guilt, to which he had resolved to bring her, by compelling her, in the remorseless fashion of his sect, his day, and his fanatical theology, to do.

penance for the intrigue which his suspicions imputed to her, in the sight of the sternest members of the small, stern remnant of the "faithful" to which he belonged. Faithful indeed in their holding on to all their Divine Master came to put away—faithful to the breaking of the bruised reed—to the quenching of the smoking flax—true to the unyielding discipline, but not to the heavenly tenderness which made such discipline only a path to bring erring souls to the strait gate and narrow way: true to a belief in the scourge and brand—but not—no not for the smallest sin—to any share in that rejoicing which thrills in the song of angels for the homeward sighs of the sheep lost in the wilderness!

It is impossible to say to what extremity he might have resorted, but for the singular demeanour of his unfortunate sister, and her appearance, which the now brightening morning first permitted him to notice. Could that be Alice?—that forlorn, haggard woman, with the loose hair unbound from its close snood, the large glassy fever-lit eyes, the dry, purple lips, set in a mindless smile—whom he beheld looking askance at him with neither surprise, nor grief, nor alarm—a horrible parody of herself?

"False, sayest thou, minion?" he replied; "Why dost thou yet wear *that*, the badge of maiden fame? Would'st thou lie even to thyself?"

He snatched from her head the black snood she wore as mourning for her mother's death, and which, as the emblem amongst her countrywomen of unsullied repute, is ever most jealously preserved. This

last insult seemed to find her less callous than the previous ones, for she struggled feebly to regain possession of the precious fillet; but he tore it away, and dashed it on the floor, together with the purse Alice had given him, and on which he only waited to observe the rich embroidery and coronet. The loud metallic ring of the gold made Alice start.

"Take *that* back if thou wilt!—the price of thy soul—the wages of iniquity with which thou wouldst have polluted my fingers; and may the curse of ill-gotten wealth poison it with a plague, as the leprosy of the Syrian clave to Gehazi! Now I am listening—weigh each word—truth may perchance win for thee such relenting as the laws thou hast violated will permit; but, mark me, I shall read in the bottom of thy soul the lies thy demon lover has put into thy mouth."

Her first sentences were spoken so collectedly and rationally as to weaken his suspicion of her semi-insanity—although her sweet, liquid tones were harsh and loud, her eyes restless and unmeaning.

"He came hither last night—late, late at night, and sought to speak with me. I knew that he would come and was waiting for him."

"Thou darest say this to my face, and not sink into the earth, which should swallow thee from my sight! To my very face, shameless!"

He lifted his cruel hand and struck her. Struck her so heavily that she shrank back like a terrified child from the rod, with a piteous plaint, begging him not to be unkind to her for their mother's sake.

Perhaps some prick of remorse found its way into that adamant heart, for his countenance clouded, and he sat down, folding his arms, and bending his eyes on the ground, and bade her go on.

"He came at the mirk midnight, the hour when dead men rise and walk, ye ken."—She interrupted herself with a quick mysterious gesture, and lowered her voice as she came closer to him.—"Dead or alive, I was blithe to see him, though I grat sorely in his arms; but then he had been killed—they had slain him—oh me! oh me!"

The wretched girl wrung her hands together, and sobbed convulsively; but no trace of moisture softened the hot lustre of her eyes or dimmed their wandering brilliancy.

"They had killed him, and he came to tell me—for he always loved me dearly, though he had never asked my love, for he was married. While he lived he was hers, but when he was dead he was mine—the dead are under no law. Free among the dead, like unto them that lie in the grave and are out of remembrance—do ye mind, brother Norman? that's in the Scripture. Why do you look so feared and wan—you were not among them that slew him?"

"Alice, Alice! miserable creature that you are! Is this madness real, or is it I that have been driven to idiotcy by your guilt and shame?"

"*My* guilt and shame?" she repeated, haughtily. "Eh, if my mother were but here, no one would dare to mint sic evil words to me! But wait, wait until I remember the rest," she continued hurriedly, holding

him in turn. "It's just a marvel to tell and to hear. I never knew till then that dead men could speak, did you, brother? Oh, but he was bonnie! though his dark, dark locks were thick wi' clots of blood and his dainty hands red wi' the same; for they were sair forfairn, I ween, before ever their swords could touch him—he is a strong man and a terrible, the bravest of all, so they hated him and swore to slay him. But he told me that one of them had smitten him thrice, and on his white breast there were three crimson, gaping wounds—that was why he looked so pale, my love, my love! and his dark e'en were so fiery and bright, like the corpse-lights that dance at night in the kirk-yards. I have seen them on our mother's grave, and could not drive them away. I would I were lying there too, and then my heart would not ache, and my head beat so wearily. Oh, mother, come and take me!"

Again the same choking, wailing sobs, the same wringing of the hands; but she hid her face in them an instant, and the sounds of despair died away into that insensate laugh which he thought more dreadful by far.

"He went before the cock crew, for he had a long, dreary journey to make, and will never return. Strange, how dead men's kisses burn! I would never have thought it, for they are always so very cold! and he had lain all night in the darksome street in the mire and wet, with the cruel rain beating on his fair face and grailly form, with nothing but his cloak to cover him. Hush! I will tell you how they did it! the devil told them where to meet him. But first, feel how scorching hot

my cheeks are, and my lips like fire; that was where he kissed me."

She stooped and pressed her face against that of her trembling, shivering judge, who had not ventured to move, overcome by that terror which men so often experience at the sight of misery they dare not brave and cannot escape from. To say that any real idea of his own share in causing his unhappy sister's calamity had dawned upon him, would be false; he regarded her insanity, whether it might prove a life-long affliction, or only a temporary form of the disease which preyed upon her, as a judgment sent for her sin, and said to himself that she had fallen into God's hand, and that she was as far removed from human condemnation as if she had been straightened in her coffin. But whatever compassion she might have excited in any other breast was in his a very faint spark, if not wholly extinguished by his repulsion and awe at her apparently supernatural knowledge of what had taken place, the expectation of hearing his own name on her frenzied lips, and the impossibility of terminating in any way this appalling interview.

He sickened at the sight and hearing of this awful loss of reason, the worst of all earthly afflictions to those condemned to witness it. To doubt the fact was now impossible—Alice was crazed—the bright mirror of her intellect had been by successive blows shattered to pieces, and each fragment only reflected a broken, distorted picture of that which had once been presented to it; and, while the cause of much of her sufferings sat with his head buried in his hands, invoking

bitter maledictions upon him to whom he attributed them, Alice had pursued her wandering discourse, alternating between lamentations for her imperfectly comprehended misfortunes and fits of levity; talking at times quite sensibly, and then suddenly confusing time, place, her own and his identity, in a manner which showed with too unmistakable plainness how completely her once calm and penetrating intelligence was unhinged.

“I would weep if I could, and wash away those fiery kisses—they are eating into my brain; but the tears winna come, and when I would weep I laugh. Ah! but ye would have laughed too, brother Norman, if ye could have seen how cannily I defeated them! They didna suspect that, while they wove the web, poor little Alice held the end of the spool-thread and broke it off in their fingers. There were two—Drummond first—Heatherfield second——”

Norman sprang up aghast at the unhesitating familiarity with which she enumerated his accomplices—Alice laid one hand on his mouth to stifle his exclamation of incredulous horror, and lifted her forefinger to her brow in a feeble effort to retain the struggling glimmer of coherent memory which linked the two first names to the fatal third—then shook her head despondingly.

“The third, the third! whom they called the godly youth David, who was to slay the persecuting Philistine—it needed more than a sling and a stone for *that* bonnie piece of work, I trow. I kenned a David once, when I was young and happy, before I met Claver’sse,

one year syne—the sixteenth of March at midnight. Now the sixteenth of March is come round again, and he is dead, and so am I; when his cold hands touched mine last night I died too, and he could not bring me back to life. Drummond hated him because he loved me.”

“And I because he has destroyed thee, soul, mind, and body!” said Norman, grey as ashes in his rage and dread, and such grief as he was capable of feeling.

“Silence, silence!” she exclaimed, “ye commanded me to tell all—now hearken to it. There *was* another—ah, Alice! who *could* it be?—and the three fell on him like ravening wolves. One is slain, one has fled with the mark of Cain upon him — No, no; you shall not go, you shall bide here!” she cried; and, as Norman would have rushed away, she clutched him fiercely by the arm. Conscience was making itself heard, and an accusing angel seemed to point with immovable, outstretched finger to the wreck on which he gazed, answering thus the rebellious, sullen question of a convicted soul, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

“Where is your companion? why are you alone? Answer me rationally, I command you.”

He endeavoured to put on his old air of authority in the attempt to quell her into reasonable tranquillity.

“Say that again—what is it? I can understand quite well,” she said gently. “My head wanders a little while; I feel that, for I forget all I would most gladly mind. It passes away like water that runneth

apace, and I cannot bind nor hold my thoughts; they come and go as the wind bloweth ——”

“Where is she? the woman—the hag—the bel-dame that lives with you? What has become of her?”

Alice laughed wildly, and beat her hands together.

“Away, away! far frae here! Do we make tryst, think ye, and have others by to spy and listen? No, no, she is gone—dead too, maybe; and when none was there to wyte me my lover came!”

“I know it, wretched lost one, that boast thee of thy dark shame!” exclaimed the young fanatic, without pausing to reflect that this speech, so confirmatory of his accusation, was but the offspring of the poor maniac’s disordered imagination. “I renounce thee, vilest of thy weak and worthless sex, that hast sinned with a high hand—I cut thee off from the camp of Israel for the love with which thou hast gone astray after the beauty of the oppressor, and hast caused the heathen to blaspheme, while they shall exult over the children of the Covenant, and cast in their teeth that their daughters are become as one of themselves! Thou shalt not see me again until I return to tell thee that the avenger of blood hath hunted down thy paramour, and exacted the deep debt which he owes;—then I will plead with thee once more, and, if thou art impenitent still, the sword of Phineas, wherewith he took away the reproach of God’s people, shall be in mine hand and shall not be turned away!”

Alice had relapsed into the state of torpid indifference which succeeded each burst of frenzied volubility; and, during the former part of this anathema, had been toying idly with one of the long, silky curls which lay profusely over her neck, twisting it round and round her fingers, and childishly admiring its shining gloss; but, as he proceeded, the vacuity of her countenance assumed a strong stamp of terror and disgust, as the stains which disfigured her tyrant's dress arrested her unsettled gaze.

"There is blood on thy hand—there is blood on thy soul! Murderer! what have I to do with thee?" she shrieked. "I know thee now who thou art—him for whom they waited, and 'tis thou hast slain my love!"

"He-lives," retorted Norman, "he *will* live until the cup of his iniquities be full, and the arm of the Lord, which has long tarried, shall tarry no longer —"

"Help! help! seize him, seize the assassin! He pardoned thee twice, but thou shalt not escape me! Help!" cried the frantic girl, and scream after scream rang through the silent house. She had locked her arms round him with such extraordinary strength, she was hanging on him with such unimaginable tenacity of madness, that his utmost efforts to master her were at first unavailing. Her neighbour, Mrs. Morison, who had loitered anxiously between her own rooms and those of Alice, and whose nervous alarm had been redoubled by Norman's arrival, now rushed to her assistance, just in time to see Norman dart past

her, little more composed than if his sister's madness had infected him, and Alice, whom he had dashed from him in the excess of a panic which, brave as he really was, made him a coward then, drop senseless on the floor, without an effort to save herself.

* * * * *

Janet, returning early, according to promise, from her absence at Libberton, was trotting briskly across the Canongate, as cheerful and active as if the last twelve hours had been spent in any other employment but that of nursing a fretful and troublesome invalid. She even revolved in her mind the propriety of abstaining from sleep altogether, and beginning at once the domestic operations of their little *ménage* without disturbing that of Alice, whose health had for some days been far from satisfactory, when a figure only too disagreeably familiar passed before her—its mien and gait inspiring her with apprehensions for which she could not account. Norman Scott had always been in her estimation a bird of ill omen; and her natural aversion to the young man had deepened into inveterate disgust from all she had observed of his unfeeling neglect and harshness to his relatives.

She was on his steps in a moment, and detained him resolutely.

“What look is that ye bear, Norman Scott? What evil fire flames in your c’e? it’s nae gude deed that gars ye flee when nae man pursueth! What hae ye dunc wi’ yer sister, man?—yer sister; speak!” shaking him roughly by the arm, “ye hae left her this minute, I would swear!”

"Ask *her* what has come about, and see if she will tell thee, harridan," answered Norman, ferociously. "Go and take thy share of the gold with which her lover bought her; it has been well earned! See if she will tell thee with what curse I have cursed her, and whether our mother's corpse will lie quiet in its grave when she is laid near it!"

"Monster! blackest villain! deevil incarnate!" cried Janet's shrill, quavering, voice. "I'll tear the heart frae yer breist wi' my ten talons gif ye hae dared to harm her!"

One or two early passengers were very naturally attracted by this furious threat, and the gestures as energetic which accompanied it; she saw this, and, subduing herself with much difficulty, glared at the object of her wrath with something not unlike the expression of a lioness defending her young from a rattlesnake.

"Go home!" said Norman, "go home to her, and play the motherly protectress, the staid guardian! Do all that is left to do now—save her blasted life if thou can'st—repentance may yet come at the eleventh hour; then let her die, like some fair, noisome weed that poisons the air and cumpers the ground with its flaunting beauty, which men pluck up and cast upon a dunghill. Bury her dishonour deep; let the earth hide it and her, that none may ever speak of it, nor bring it to mind, while I—my task lies before me, and I thirst to fulfil it!"

The burden of this parting salutation—disgrace, vengeance, and woe—rang in Janet's ears like the

tolling of her darling's funeral knell; but her worst conjectures were exceeded by the reality she found on arriving at home.

Alice was still perfectly insensible, and poor Mrs. Morison, never famed for presence of mind, crying over her in the greatest distress and perplexity. Janet bid the kind, simple woman assist her, but made no inquiries, expressed no astonishment—setting about such measures as the occasion demanded in a grim, hard way that quite frightened her timid gossip. Mrs. Morison once offered to enter upon explanations, but Janet shut her mouth.

“Haud yer clavers, cummer; it's no when the deid-grip is on my bairn that I hae the will for speiring or hearkening to tales o' them that's murdered her.”

They laid her in her bed, and sent for a physician, an old man who had attended Madam Scott in her last sickness; but the most vigorous remedies failed to produce the desired effect, and during the whole day Alice gave no evidence of animation except a slight spasmodic quivering of the hands and the almost imperceptible breathing. Janet was induced by the very alarm which the patient's condition created to pay some attention to her friend's account of the extraordinary nocturnal visit which had been the beginning of sorrows, of Alice's abandonment of sudden despair, and the altercation which had signalled her short interview with Norman.

The description was as accurate as could be expected from the mental constitution of the witness; and the dark, curled locks, haughty bearing, and high rank

of the unknown immediately fixed Janet's suspicions upon the Earl of Glencarrig; but the motive of such a visit, his communication to Alice, the connection of these with Norman's violence—every thing else in fact—was one inextricable mystery, which as yet she cared little to fathom. After extracting the last scrap of information from the woman, Janet bade her go; she could suffice for all that was required, and she resented, almost jealously, that a comparative stranger should interfere in the smallest service between herself and the darling of her old age—the child who had replaced her buried children, and had been as the last flower left in a wintry garden, more beloved for its fragile loneliness than the gayest ornaments of a gaudier season.

Mrs. Morison rather reluctantly obeyed, and, fain to rest contented with a permission to join her in keeping the night-watch, left Janet supporting the girl in her arms, and bathing a large, livid bruise, caused by her heavy fall, which darkened one snowy temple.

“Come back! come back! see ye here!” she cried, “Oh Bessy Morison, woman! was ever sae waeful a thing seen on sae young a head!”

She might well say it, and weep so fast and freely, and kiss those rich brown locks with such fervent pity! Lifting their soft clusters from the pillow where they strayed, she bade her neighbour approach and look. The angel of death had swept over that fair head of eighteen summers, and his scathing pinion had set there a mark by which to seal her for his own. The

dusky gold of her thick tresses were streaked with silver grey.

* * * *

Night fled away, a second day rose, and life, long dormant, burst at length through the stupor which had all of death but its eternal and perfect rest, racking the tender frame with a torture of mind and body which we have no courage to imagine, still less to depict.

And at that self-same hour—while Alice in the fiercest delirium of brain fever lay tossing on her miserable bed of fire and thorns—the man whom this strong, faithful heart had loved too well, rode out from the city on his gallant but desperate enterprize—proud and undismayed as a conqueror marching to assured victory, with exultant energy and tameless vigour bounding through every vein—but dogged by a foe as irreconcilable, as inevitable, as deadly, as the sullen doom which hung over the fabled heroes of an elder world—embodied for him in the shape of Norman Scott.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

Elle n' attendit pas un second avenir,
Elle ne languit pas de doute en espérance,
Elle ne disputa pas sa vie à la souffrance,
Elle but d'un seul trait le vase de douleur.

LAMARTINE.

It is impossible for any reflecting person to have passed through the world without observing the remarkable providence by which the great events of our existence, the intense joys and equally intense sorrows which seem intended to give us a foretaste of our capacity for perfect bliss or unutterable woe, are mercifully confined to such short periods of time that we do not sink beneath the latter, nor cling too exclusively to the former. Were it otherwise—were such happiness as we are sometimes permitted rather to *perceive* than to feel more lasting than it is ever known to be—earth would become our home, and the better country, that is, the heavenly, only a change from one sphere of rapture to another—we should cease to long for it; while if, as in mercy is forbidden, the maddening bitterness of some anguish could be prolonged, with the sensibility which endures it, what better image could we have of that fearful reality—living death? But both such gifts, the one scarcely more fatal than the other, are denied by a wisdom which is foolishness

in the eyes of those who dwarf Infinity to the measure of a man, and Life flows on in a broad, still ocean, in which the maelstrom where that life's happiness has been engulfed is but a speck upon the vast surface—where the little isle in which our richest jewels are garnered up can scarcely be distinguished from the rippling waters above which it raises its green and fertile banks.

Such a point of space, such an atom in the rolling sea of time, had been the hour before midnight on the sixteenth of March. The influences which preceded, the results which attended it, involved more or less remotely the destinies of four individuals—the thoughts generated, the resolutions inspired, the suffering created had all centred in or proceeded from the short interval spent by Lord Dundee in the humble chamber of a poor and aged woman—from a few plain words exchanged with an inoffensive orphan girl.

What that hour had been to her it needs not to conjecture. None ever heard it from her, not even in the most unfettered ravings which succeeded to the swoon that snatched her from the consciousness of her misery. Hers had ever been a remarkable temperament—body and mind alike of a material so fine and an organization so perfect as to oppose an extraordinary resistance to the inroads of disease. The few who approached her during those weeks of perilous sickness marvelled much whence that delicate creature, worn to a mere shadow, could draw the obstinate vitality which during two whole months kept death at bay through sufferings which might have broken down

a strong man in the prime of his age. They little imagined the yet more indomitable energy of will which had never but once betrayed her at the crisis of her fate; and which now, gathering its poor scattered remains of energy and thought, rallied blindly, instinctively, round her life-secret, to defend it to the last—like the undaunted survivors of a gallant army round the citadel of a maiden city. To one ear alone had its weakness been revealed, one eye alone had been admitted to scan its sacred recesses, none other should ever profane that sanctuary. Amongst all the names which were incessantly on her lips, *his* was never pronounced—the cloud which enwrapped the real origin of her illness was not lifted even to the faithful watcher who filled a mother's place to Alice. She grasped and held that fast while all else escaped her; and Janet, listening with sad curiosity to the incoherent lamentations, the agonized self-condemnation which poured forth from Alice's tortured brain, while the poor sufferer lay for days beneath the clutch of the fever-fiend, without an instant's respite from the frightful visions which stood around her couch, applied them all to certain suspicions which she had built up as usual upon the foundation of Lord Glencarrig's attachment to his foster-sister—to the love which she believed Alice to entertain for him.

And here, in justice to this honest and generous woman, let us say once for all, that the foul aspersions cast by Norman Scott upon his innocent sister had filled her with nothing but scornful incredulity. Her affection for the beautiful, noble-minded girl upon

whom fate—nay, rather Providence—*fate* is the deity of an unbeliever's creed—had brought in succession such severe trials of faith and patience, was of a kind rarely met with, so great was its utter, immutable confidence. If Alice had accused *herself* of sinful thought or deed, the doating guardian would rather have chosen to believe her the victim of a delusion than have granted the smallest credit to any possibility of a stain on her delicate purity. Well for her, as for the sufferer, that such was the case, for frequent and terrible were the hours when poor Alice would pray and supplicate for mercy, crying aloud that she had sinned beyond forgiveness and was accursed and an outcast—crouching and clinging in the weeping nurse's arms, seeking refuge there from the chastisement which she believed about to crush her for the crime of her sad ignorance—for the idolatry which had grown up between her and her God, shutting out all else but itself from her worship, to be bestowed on one to whom all earthly and heavenly laws forbade her to lift her eyes. That she was parted from him for ever, that he could never have one touch of tenderness for her—this certainty, bitter as it might have been to many another, had had no such desolation in it to that pure conscience and pious heart as the conviction, so suddenly and fearfully awakened, of a cherished, unrepented offence against its Maker. No paroxysms of her delirium were half so exhausting to herself or so painful to her attendant as those in which *this* grief, aggravated by disease to wildest remorse, betrayed itself in all its intensity.

“ Oh now, if it please Thee, take my life for the life of the bairn !” was Janet’s perpetual supplication, and it seemed to find some acceptance, for each day was fought through, each night dragged out, as if an invisible chain bound the wounded dove to earth, that she could not soar and be at rest. Standing on the brink of the grave for weeks together, Alice did not sink into it, but lingered on. April came to an end, May was brightening the face of Nature with its leaves and flowers, and still she was alive ; Janet had even begun to indulge a vague hope that she might yet recover, and scanned the physician’s countenance at each visit, in the expectation of finding it reflected there. A doubtful shake of the head—some words of conventional evasive encouragement, were however the most he could concede, and her sanguine disposition, intolerant of any suspense, made her one day insist upon his communicating the worst fears he could gather from the patient’s symptoms. Was it not true that during several days the returns of fever had been less frequent and less high—the lethargy which succeeded to them less death-like and long-continued—the delirium less violent—that she had even been visited by short snatches of calmer, more healthy sleep ? What did he see that could make him look as grave as at the highest pitch of her disorder ?

These questions, and a multitude of others, Janet uttered in a voluble string. They *were* true, and he quite acknowledged it, but did not look one whit less serious, nor abstain from his ominous shake of the head.

"A puir comforter ye are—a vera Job's friend, Maister Guthrie," quoth Janet sharply, and again enforced her desire that he should without dissimulation tell her what she had to expect.

She had not certainly expected his answer, and it struck her with a fresh dismay, more bewildering, more difficult to grasp, than her first trouble. *That* might have an end, this had none, throughout an interminable vista of years, of which she would see but few. He said that in all human probability the girl's excellent constitution would enable her to rally, she might even regain her former health, but (and Janet's hawk-eyes seemed ready to drag the tardy sentences from his mouth) the oppression on the brain had been so dangerous, the shock to the nervous system so sudden and overwhelming, that, if life were preserved, it would most likely be at the expense of reason.

At this doom, pronounced upon the child of her adoption with the apparent absence of emotion of one blunted by habit to such sorrowful scenes, Janet's grief and anger, which had been twitching in every wrinkle of her faded but expressive features, flamed up fiercely and unreasonably, as it will do in such sincere, undisciplined tempers.

"Ye tell me *that!* wi' my burdalane lying there! and speak it wi' e'e and voice as cauld as gif ye were bidding me cry on her to rise on her bridal morn! Hae ye sauld yer heart, or had ye ever ane? Man, man! do ye believe in a God?"

"And what if I do, or do not, good dame?"

replied Master Guthrie, with something of the scepticism which too often unfortunately encrusts the minds of men in his profession.

“ If ye do not, I hae naething to say to ye; but gif ye believe that He is a gude and a just God, and a Father to them that call upon his name, will ye daur to say that sic a doolfu’ weird as yon is written for my darling? for her that never harmed a living thing, that was pure as a snaw-wreath and patient as a martyr—that for her love and sweetness, her duty and truth, might be ane o’ thae angels that aye stand before the throne to do his bidding! Dinna speak it again, ye are just rank blaspheming!”

The old physician merely shrugged his shoulders; this simple form of belief was beyond his comprehension, and the poignant sorrow which darkened the prospects of Janet and her charge was only one in a hundred of his customary experience.

Henceforward the whole acuteness of Janet’s unremitting attention was absorbed by the tokens of returning intelligence which she discovered in her patient. Strangely enough, no marked crisis such as usually decides the termination of such diseases had taken place, and the advances towards convalescence which had inspired her now almost fearful hopes had been so slow and trifling as hardly to warrant them. They gradually assumed, however, a more decisive form, although, since the moment when her attendants placed her senseless on the bed from which she had not risen again, Alice had never once recognised even Janet or the old physician, and in the harassed

mind of the former a dread lest the doctor's predictions should be fulfilled was becoming half a certainty, angrily as she had denied such a possibility. Those who have spent interminable weeks by the bedside of an object in whom they have reposed the few remaining interests of existence, until the silent, closely-guarded apartment, the uneasy, sleepless couch, the one pale, dependent, suffering inmate, have grown to be the core and kernel of their world, can imagine what her vigils were; to others it would be a waste of time to describe in any language their concentrated wakefulness, and the minute accuracy and quickness of perception which even a dull nature will acquire under such teaching.

One afternoon, about the middle of May, Janet sat at the foot of her patient's bed, who had been sleeping for several hours after a night and morning of constant wandering—less violent, if scarcely more coherent, than usual. The old dame's hands were crossed on her lap, where they had fallen with the knitting they held, and with which she perhaps fancied herself busy; but her eyes were fixed exclusively upon the figure before her—so wasted and feeble that its breath could not be heard even in the perfect hush of the shaded room; while such was the pallor which overspread the bloodless cheek and sunken temples, that the rich chestnut hair looked dark against it—the brown eyebrows and lashes almost black. Changed, oh, how changed! from the blooming, gay-hearted child of sixteen, who, little more than two years back, had been the apple of her doating father's eye; changed from the fair, graceful girl, who twelve months before had presented so ex-

quisite a contrast to Flora Bethune's dazzling charms; changed even from the brave, single-hearted woman, who, casting aside all frigid, false conventionalities, had dared to let her soul utter so noble a language to him who had won its virgin love. Beautiful ever, in sickness as in health, with that loveliness which draws from sorrow and decay its most refined and ethereal perfection; but so sadly, so quickly, so irrevocably altered!

Perhaps to Janet the difference was less conspicuous than it would have been to one who had not seen its gradual approaches, the expressions which played over her countenance being rather those of relief and dawning satisfaction than of despondency. After a while, she knelt down and repeated in a whisper a prayer which she had of late added in an especial manner to her customary devotions—a quaint and unsophisticated composition enough, but offered up with a confiding faith that is more often met with amongst the ignorant and poor than some who are called deeply religious would be apt to believe. Janet always looked for a positive and tangible answer to her petitions, and whether this be on the whole a presumptuous expectation let those decide who have ever known by experience the force of the divine word—"Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name shall be given unto you."

She had finished and softly risen, with a new-born flutter of more vivid hope than usual swelling in her honest heart. A slight disarrangement of the neatly folded drapery which covered the sleeping girl struck

her eye, and very cautiously she bent to adjust it. Drawing back her head the next instant, a thrill of such delight as a child's first conscious caress darts through a mother's heart, made hers leap. Alice had awakened, quietly and naturally, and had fixed her eyes on those of her nurse.

Not with the lurid flashing lustre of fever, not with the glazed stare of stupor, but humid and thoughtful; Alice's own eyes of twilight brown, deep, calm, and pure; Alice's living, loving self, looking out from them.

"Janet, dear Janet! is that you?"

The faint sweet voice did but reach her ear ere it broke; the little hand, cool and fresh now, could but just touch her withered neck ere it fell again on the coverlet; but all the kindly, grateful nature was in those tremulous sounds, that imperfect gesture.

It was as much as Janet could accomplish, in the rapture of her gladness, to avoid clasping the girl in her arms, and venting the feelings she had kept down with a self-denial wonderful in her. But she forbore—Alice's life and newly-returning senses hung upon less than a thread, a mere hair; she drove her sensations back until a more propitious time—her throat aching, her face flushed, her eyes dazzled. Poor Janet! self-command was too new a study to be easily practised at such a conjuncture.

"Have I slept long?" asked Alice, trying to turn and look about her, but that was impossible.

"Ay, dearie," answered Janet, in a very husky voice.

"Have I been ill? is this home?" and the effort she made in her weakness to look steadily at each familiar

object was like the astonished uncertainty of a traveller just returned after years and years of absence.

"Ay, dearie," answered Janet again; for her life she could not have brought out more than those two words of assent.

Alice was too weak, and her nurse too much moved, to exchange any other question and answer for a while; then Janet felt the little fingers wrap themselves round hers, and try to squeeze them close; she understood that the poor girl was endeavouring to thank her for what she firmly believed had been done for her in her need, the charitable service she would have rendered, nay, had so often ungrudgingly rendered, to others. Hot tears were dropping over both hands, but Alice's face wore a smile.

"They are all away," she murmured, drawing her breath in a long sigh. "Oh, dear Janet, what an awful dream I have dreamt!"

"'Deed, burdalane, and that's ower true," said Janet, soothingly, "but ye maunna think o' that the noo."

"My father and my mother were there, and Norman too, and — where have I been? how long is it? what has happened?"

"Naething ava! bide still, my heart's joy, and gang to sleep again, like a douce bairn as ye are."

"Stay by me, Janet; you'll bide here, will you not?" said Alice, apprehensively. "Promise to cry on me, and wake me if I dream again. I would not see them any more for a kingdom—for worlds —"

The words dwindled off into indistinct mutterings; in five minutes the transparent blue veined lids had sunk

again, the lips unclosed like a child's, and Alice was plunged once more in the health-giving slumber by which nature repairs the wasted vigour of humanity.

During the whole night which followed this incident, so fraught with good omen, Janet did not close her eyes. Very rarely had she permitted any one to relieve her during the last two months, although neighbours and gossips, kindly officious friends, had not been lacking to share her fatigues; but their assistance had only been accepted so far as was indispensable to enable her to recruit the strength which, robust as it was, she dared not overtax; and during many successive days and nights, when the fever was at its height, and the delirium incessant, every one but the physician had been rigorously excluded. She would have no inquisitive ears by to glean up her darling's wild sayings, no idle tongues furnished with food for slander, and materials for the construction of every species of romancing explanation, she would not afford the slightest hold for further comment—too much mischief might have been done already. On such occasions, and they had been but too frequent, Janet had kept her watch alone.

She was now in a state of mind hovering between hope and anxious distrust of the possibility of any improvement being lasting, which completely indisposed her for the society even of quiet Mistress Morison. By one of those mysterious links between past and present, cause and effect, which we can only admit without explaining, the mid-hours of night had always been most dangerous to Alice, destroying the fairest promise of amendment, and reviving in all its fury

the frenzy which had lulled during the day. For these then Janet waited—only rising from her seat to light the lamp when darkness came on, in order to lose no variation of colour, attitude, or expression, which might calm her fears or feed her growing hopes.

Twilight came on—then night—deep and hushed—the distant rumours of the street grew more few and far between—the most trifling sounds of her little inner universe more absorbingly distinct. Ten o'clock struck.

It was at such a time that the red glow was wont to gather in Alice's white, hollow cheek, the restless fire in her dim glance, that she would toss and mutter distempered wailing words in her waking visions, preludes to the fiercer ravings which retraced in such burning vividness the causes which had prostrated her there; but now she did not stir, her brow and lips were cool, her hand moist; and when Janet, risking every thing in the unbearable suspense, slipped her own into that which had not moved a line since she herself laid it outside the covering, it was not Alice's pulse which beat so fast and irregularly at the ends of the questioning fingers, but the irrepressible throbbing of her own affectionate heart.

Midnight approached. Fain would Janet have knelt down to pray that she might be spared the cruel trial which this hour had hitherto brought, but the very rustling of her garments, the slightest creaking of the floor, might break in upon those precious minutes of renovating sleep—so she folded her hands and tried to elevate her thoughts as she sat; but, while her lips shaped the words with customary emphasis

and fervour, she discovered that she could not for one moment keep a conception of their meaning before her. And with a vague, unformed aspiration, a mental lifting of the hands and bowing of the knees to Heaven, with a sad remorseful self-rebuke for her own slothfulness of heart, the poor tired spirit sank down to its nest on earth again.

As the single stroke from the church-tower hard by tolled the first hour after midnight, the lamp, which had for some time waned and flickered, went out altogether. Unluckily Janet, to prevent its light from disturbing Alice, had placed it beyond her own reach, and she was afraid to rise and replenish it. She was in despair at this untoward accident, and her sole resource was to feel cautiously for Alice's hand, and make touch and hearing do the work of sight until daylight, if indeed her constrained silence were not painfully ended before then. All the chances that could make the future a vista of placid happiness or a burden of incurable grief, were shrouded in the dark veil of those shadowy daughters of Time which flit by us so unheeded in our prosperous repose, but which sickness and wakeful misfortune transform into solemn messengers of repentance, of warning, or of pardon and mercy—mystic bearers of the Heaven-decreed tidings of weal or woe. They smiled benignly on the faithful watcher, and passed, leaving a real, if transient, blessing behind.

The bright dawn silvered at last a little patch of sky which could be seen from the pent-up window, and crept along the bare walls, painting their sober hue with delicate gradations of argent, rose, and gold, as the

clear spring morn flushed the heavens with its lustre. But not the brightest sun-beam that ever strayed to gladden a captive in his dungeon was more welcome to his gloomy loneliness than the calm light which shone in the eyes of Alice to the doubting heart of her old friend, when the first rays stole over her face and awoke her with their kisses; the most exquisite music is less sweet than the short sentences in which she told of delicious rest, of soothing, divine dreams—such as might float around a rescued soul just raised from Purgatory to Paradise—and for the fond thanks, for the murmured “Dear, good Janet; dear *mother*,” for the sight of the quiet tears which rolled from amongst the wet and tangled lashes, while the smile still played on her mouth as she lay with half-closed eyes on her pillows, Janet would have borne the rack without a complaint. Her emotion was so great that, when for a few minutes she could resolve to leave Alice, she shut herself into the outer room, and there gave loose to all the vehement feelings which were contending for the mastery—joy, gratitude, sorrow, triumph, by turns or together striving for supremacy, and displaying themselves in tears, sobs, exclamations, in clasped hands, in hysterical laughter, in every extravagance by which a strong, untutored character might be supposed to take its revenge for long and courageous self-suppression. And this not once, but many times during the day; her anxiety had been so intense that she could not immediately accustom herself to its removal, and it was only while she continued within sight of the invalid that she fully realized the fact.

“ Saved, saved! Ou, I kenned weel that God wouldna call her awa’ frae me yet! I hae foughten wi’ Death, and fought a gude fight. I would ha’ stude up and riven her frae his arms! sac dear is she to me, my lamb, my bonnie white rose, my daughter Alice! Ochone, but she ca’d me *mither*, ‘dear mither,’ quo’ she — ”

She said all this with passionate energy to Bessy Morison, a few days later than the circumstances we have just related; very much astonishing and almost shocking thereby that gentle personage. Alice’s convalescence was advancing slowly, but steadily enough to present no prospect of a relapse; and, what was more important than mere bodily strength, her mind seemed to have recovered its tone and faculties perfectly unimpaired. Whether her once excellent memory shared equally in this general restoration, and to what extent the various distressing scenes which had occasioned her illness were present to it, was very difficult to determine, since she never alluded to them in any way. Janet, whose spirits had taken their habitual rebound and were rising faster than they had ever sunk, hardly knew whether to feel satisfaction or regret at this — satisfaction predominating as soon as the least unfavourable symptom brought into play her aversion to whatever might agitate the invalid by exciting such terrible reminiscences — regret kicking the beam by intervals when all went smoothly, as far as could be discerned, and her very excusable curiosity had time to increase by a contemplation of the various entanglements of so intricate a mystery.

CHAPTER XLV.

TWILIGHT AND DAWN.

Ne from henceforth doth any fleshly sense
Nor idle thought of earthly things remain.

* * * * *

Their joy, their comfort, their desire, their gain,
Is fixed all on that which now they see.
All other sights but faded shadows be.

SPENSER.

JANET RUTHERFORD was not, as the reader may have remarked, exactly the most fitting consoler to minister to a mind diseased; but there could be no doubt of her capacity for meeting every description of bodily requirement. No nursing could be more efficient, no attendance more untiring; the occupation seemed to gift her with a tact and judgment quite foreign, under ordinary circumstances, to her impetuous and by no means reflective disposition. Under the influence of this vigilant and prudent care, Alice's health so far improved that at the end of a fortnight she was able to leave her bed, and was carried by her indefatigable nurse to her mother's former seat near the window of the sitting-room, into which the warm spring sunlight and the gay spring breezes danced pleasantly to bid her welcome.

This was indeed a day of triumph for Janet, who being, as we said, not at all of a reflective turn, had no misgivings as to how far that triumph was or was not

premature, or how much of it might be traced to the failure of Master Guthrie's alarming prophecy, and the fulfilment of her own indignant protest against what she now stigmatised as "croaking." She was but an ignorant, impulsive, half-taught peasant, and she loved Alice with so entire and disinterested affection, which had shown itself in so many incontrovertible forms, that we have no desire to moralize severely upon her shortcomings in some other matters. The only twinge of pain or foreboding which marred her pleasure that day was occasioned by the striking resemblance—never perceptible until then — which appeared in Alice to what her mother had been during her last illness; and by the melancholy distinctness of the unnatural tinge of grey which discoloured the sick girl's beautiful hair—both made her heart ache.

But to these sights, and the uncasiness they caused, two or three days sufficed to accustom her; and, in the leisure which Alice's tranquil period of recovery afforded, Janet's curiosity grew and spread amazingly. It would soon have degenerated into inquisitiveness—a lower form of the same propensity—but for the respect she bore to Alice, and a sturdy resolution not to annoy by intrusive inquiries, but to wait until she could enter on the subject spontaneously. Not being, as we know, in possession of the master-key to the whole secret, her lively imagination had started on a wrong scent; transformed certain occurrences to the bent of her own conjectures, taken others for granted, forged such trifling links as were wanting to complete the chain of evidence, and ended by constructing an

elaborate romance upon the inconclusive grounds which usually serve for such erections, with the materials provided by the fragmentary and often contradictory ravings of poor Alice, the scanty suggestions and yet more scanty facts derived from Mrs. Morison, and the abundant supplies of her own preconceived ideas, which, being indubitably *possibilities*, she had chosen to assume as the only *probabilities*. Of this castle in the air, it is of course superfluous to state that Lord Glencarrig was, in a manner, the corner-stone.

A slight but very characteristic action of Alice's put the finishing touch to her edifice of supposition, and established it immoveably in her mind. Alice had formerly had a habit, when unoccupied—a rare thing enough—of twisting round and round upon her finger the ring which Flora had given her, using it apparently as a sort of talisman to recall with greater force the different associations connected with it and the giver. This gesture recurred naturally during those days of listless weakness when the hands which had never known idleness could no longer employ themselves with their favourite labours, and once, after a little dreamy surprise at not finding the ring in its place, Alice looked at Janet, and saw her smiling at her embarrassment.

"Wait ye, hinnie—it's safe enough, the pretty sparkler, I hae it here."

She fetched it accordingly, and slipped it on to the girl's finger, eyeing her curiously; she half feared, half desired to see some emotion manifest itself on her face. Alice raised her hand, and contemplated the shimmer-

ing brightness of the jewelled circlet pensively for a minute or two; pressing the other nervously over her heart she leaned back on her cushions and shut her eyes, trying to exclude some undesirable remembrance or stifle some internal pain. When she moved at last, as if relieved, the ring rolled down on to the ground; alas! the little hoop would almost have surrounded two of her attenuated fingers now. Janet would have replaced it, but Alice gently refused.

"I shall not wear it again, dear Janet, put it by—keep it until——" she paused, as if uncertain what the end of her sentence ought to be.

"Until ye hae forgotten him whase name was in yer heart whenever ye lookit upon it—eh, my puir bairn?" said Janet kindly, as she smoothed down the fair locks braided by her own careful hands.

A beautiful sudden glow, like the reflection of sunset on snow, flashed over the girl's countenance, but her sweet composure did not vary in the least.

"No, Janet, I trust I never *shall* forget him, but to wear that gift now would be a tempting of providence that hath brought me out of a fiery furnace to show me the greatness of my own folly. Put by Flora's ring, Janet, then come and sit beside me, that I may see your kind face, and I will tell you the truth of all that you have only guessed hitherto."

Janet's answer bordered on the heroic.

"Ye hae nae call to do that, my doo. Dinna grieve yersel' wi' raking up auld sores to please me, if ye hae nae broo yersel' to do sae."

"I have, for many reasons," she answered with quiet

firmness. "You must certainly have divined much already, and you have well deserved what confidence I can bestow, and more, my second mother. I would not have you think that, whatever her faults may have been, Alice would deceive you or disgrace herself."

Briefly and simply she narrated all that the reader has already learnt, up to the close of her interview with Lord Dundee, dwelling on no particulars, nor repeating any details of that season of wretchedness, and not merely concealing with rigid secrecy the name of the chief actor therein, but eliminating every little salient point which could guide her hearer into the track of discovering it. This, which would have been a most important omission to any one else, did not cool Janet's interest by a single degree; the hero of Alice's sad and singular tale stood ready created in her own mind, she placed him unhesitatingly in every situation described, filled up every blank with his name, and, as nothing in the whole story was of a nature to militate against this substitution, or to convey any impression of discrepancy, Janet congratulated herself upon her own remarkable perspicacity and indulged in mental comments upon the supposed inconstancy and heartless conduct of Lord Glencarrig which would have rather startled that nobleman. Still, as Alice did not think fit to change the style of her recital, and continued it to the end with the same careful avoidance of the *name*, Janet conformed herself as usual to her charge's lead, and neither pressed to be enlightened nor hinted at her own convictions. All she allowed herself was to convey in language rather energetic than polished her

view of the wrong done to Alice. All questions were one-sided to Janet, and the side which she now saw was that her darling had been made utterly miserable.

"He did not wrong me; never say it again, Janet! he acted honourably, bravely, nobly, as he ever does—he must not bear the burden of my fault. I loved him too well, and he, wealthy, proud, and happy, was the husband of another. Janet!" and her young face grew solemn in its deep pathos, "I stood there, and heard him say those words, 'Alice, I am married,'—I looked into my own breast and knew how I *had* loved him, I looked at him and understood how I loved him still, and I did not die! How *could* that be? How could I take every stab to my bare heart so, and not fall dead before him! He left me, and I doubted God's mercy—I cried for death, and it would not come—then Norman struck and cursed me—all the rest is one mist of horrible darkness, in which I was bound down upon a fiery rack, condemned to an eternity of torment. I thank God that my sinful wish was unheard, and that He has spared me a little ere I go hence and am no more seen."

"That ring belonged to him, burdalane. I thought as mickle lang syne."

Alice made a sign of assent, but, as Janet began to put some new question, the girl touched her on the lips very softly.

"That is all I can tell; you must never speak of this again," she said. So Janet held her peace.

"Oh, Lord Glencarrig! that ever ye lo'ed my Alice and yet could turn yer e'e upon anither! that e'er ye

hoped to win her and yet could wed a stranger—some vain painted peat o' a grit leddy—for the love of siller and gowd and braid heritage—then come and flaunt yer treason in her very face! Gude save us! can sic cruelty be in man? sae young, sae gallant, and sae douce to see—yet mair fause than he was fair! Oh it needsna the Scripture to tell us that their hearts is deceitfu' and desperately wicked!”

Such was the general tone of Janet's soliloquies, and such the private anathemas which she vented on the innocent head of the young earl, who, supposing her view of the case to have been as correct in reality as firmly believed in by herself, could not be said to have merited this wholesale condemnation. Alice's short narration had not lasted ten minutes, but it had furnished her old nurse's busy brain with an inexhaustible store to work upon, and, regarding past events from the point of observation which we have indicated, she could not refrain from wondering at the unalterable calmness and affection with which Alice always referred to the Glencarrig family, including its young chief himself, and which seemed to Janet quite irreconcilable with Alice's repugnance to wear the ring bestowed by his sister, simply on account of its having once been in his possession. She had not the right thread to guide her through the maze, and therefore never arrived at so clear and definite a solution of her difficulties as to answer them all at once. Profiting however by the additional leisure and freedom of mind arising from Alice's partial amendment, the worthy woman applied herself very decidedly to the trouble-

some though dignified business of composing a private epistle to the countess, relating the severe illness of her *protégée*, and containing a respectful intimation of her wish for the lady's speedy return. This latter portion of the communication was pervaded by a latent and almost imperceptible tinge of uneasiness, for which Janet had no precise reason to allege, and which, if put into shape and presented to her by a third party, she would have scouted as ungrounded and absurd. Alice was indisputably better; the fever had completely disappeared, her spirits were equal and even cheerful; yet any degree of excitement or little unusual exertion was apt to bring on fits of fainting and subsequent languor, which undid in half an hour the progress she had taken days to make. Janet had grown more than ever solicitous to avoid any accident of the sort; so the letter was written by Mrs. Morison under Janet's dictation and close inspection, and, turning out after much zealous labour a sufficiently legible specimen of orthography and penmanship, was dispatched through the usual channel, unknown to Alice.

Upon the same prudential considerations, the old nurse thought it advisable to render Norman's name a dead letter, and banish all subjects of discourse which referred to him. She had ascertained that his sister only retained a very vague recollection of the altercation which preceded her illness, and that beyond the moment when he struck her Alice's mind was almost a blank. Nor did she in the scanty mention of him which passed between her and her old friend give the latter the slightest reason to conclude that she

had understood his reproaches or suspected the violent intentions with which he had left her. Janet did not consider herself called upon to dissipate this cloud, and, between her angry abhorrence of the young fanatic, and the excessive grief which any reference to his guilty conduct produced in his sister, the subject was a forbidden one. Alice had suffered so much from the agitation it occasioned when first mentioned, that Janet immediately arrived at the determination to postpone all such disagreeable discussions until the period of Alice's thorough recovery—one not far distant in her calendar.

This was a very refreshing little oasis in the wilderness through which they had lately toiled, and both rested peacefully in it, beneath a sky of soft, misty grey, which, whether it darkened hereafter to the sombre storm-hue or melted into the azure of the most dazzling sunshine, was all they needed for present comfort. None would have guessed, to see the cheerful content which beamed from Janet's face, and the sweet placidity of Alice—her ready smile, her calm eyes, the lovely colour on cheek and lip, pure as the heart of a Provence rose, and evanescent as the tints of sunset—none, or very few, would have guessed that in that fair blossom the canker lurked, that the silver cord was slowly fretting away, so that the time she had to spend on earth might have been counted by days, perhaps by hours; yet so it was.

When Alice said in the anguish of her sorrow that she had her death-blow, she instinctively spoke the very truth; when she exclaimed that her heart

was broken, she had used no common-place expression of despair. That subtle and mysterious disease of which her father had died in his prime, which, while it neglects not to apprise its victim by unmistakeable tokens of its approach, yet hovers over him with cruel caprice, sparing him for years to smite him down with infallible aim and lightning swiftness when least he thinks the final blow is nigh—this, the sole heritage he had to leave, had descended to Alice.

It would certainly have developed itself sooner or later, under the pressure of such emotions as chequer a sensitive and impassioned woman's existence, but it had been forced into premature and fatal activity by the various trials to which Alice had been exposed during the last twelve months.

She remembered her father's death too well, and had noted too closely the progress of his malady, to fail of recognising at once its effects upon herself; and, bearing thus within her own breast a solemn admonition of the uncertain shortness of her waning life, she could take little share in all Janet's sanguine schemes for the future, to which she only responded by a grave, sad smile. Nor was it surprising that she should constantly endeavour to wean her companion's thoughts from such projects, and lead her to a perception of their futility, when framed for one who might never live to see the nearest of them realised.

"Janet," said Alice one day, after the good woman had been setting forth one of her favourite day-dreams, which a more than usual degree of languor rendered

peculiarly uncongenial to the invalid, "Janet, did I ever tell you how my father died?"

Janet quite started at the abrupt question, falling like a bomb into a peaceful village, into the midst of her high-flown visions, and bringing her back to realities with unwelcome suddenness.

"Na, Elsie, not that I mind o'. 'Tis an unco' question that, dearie."

"Not so strange, either," replied Alice with something that was both smile and sigh. "Dear Janet, I should like to tell you about it. Will you hear me now?"

"Ay, surely, burdalane, that or onything else ye please, it's a' ane to me," replied Janet readily; "but it's an eerie matter to be speaking anent, I'm thinking. Hadna ye better pit it aff till a better time?"

"No time like the present," replied Alice. "I have a reason—better not put it off any more."

"Aweel, hinnie, I'm sure what pleases you pleases me, sae I'm hearkening," replied Janet, humouring what she supposed to be an invalid's fancy, engendered by inaction, weakness, and a morbid dwelling upon sorrowful images.

"My father died when I was a few months past sixteen, this summer two years back. He had been ailing in a strange way, not sickly to look at, but with sudden fits and swoons as I have had. My mother and I often thought he had died in one of them, he lay so deathlike; and the doctor talked long words and hard names out of his book, but could help him nane. One night, a stormy night in July, (I can

see the dusky purple of the sky and the wrack of the storm-clouds now, as I saw them from the hallan of our manse,) my father came home late, sadly tired and dejected. He came to the keeping-room, where I and my mother were, she spinning the wool for winter, and I reading to her. I mind it was the chapter that tells the story of the raising of Lazarus; she loved to hear it.

"He sat him down beside me and drew me on his knee. I put my arms round his neck and asked what was wrong. He kissed me, and answered nothing, but presently he said to my mother,

" 'Margaret, Norman is dead.'

"Norman!" ejaculated Janet.

"My uncle was so named—my father's brother. If ever I could have foreseen that the day would come when I should say that it had been well for *him* to have died then! Oh, father! that ever your child should become a murderer in will, if not in very deed!"

Wondering much, and puzzled moreover by a shapeless impression of some purpose hidden behind this pursuance of an agitating subject, Janet stopped her wheel, and pulled her three-legged stool close to Alice's chair.

" 'Margaret, Norman is dead,' said he. My mother gave a shriek and wrung her hands and wept, but I did not. I never wept easily, even as a little bairn, and now my tears were all fleyed away—I could not take my eyes from my father, and I held him faster round the neck, so that at last

he said, 'Let me go, little daughter, let me go.' Then I loosed my arms, and he put me down on the settle, and went walking slowly and wearily up and down, with his hand laid *here*, and his face quite white. My mother didna see that, for she had hidden her eyes, but I watched him; and, if fright had dried my tears before, they came no quicker now. He went to my mother and took down her hands into his. Poor mother! she never liked my uncle Norman, but she was aye tender-spirited, and we knew that he could have died in no common way.

" 'He is gone at last, Margaret,' said my father. 'May he be prepared for his account! God forgive them who caused his death! God forgive him for seeking it!'

" He then told us how my uncle had been put under ban; but that we partly knew, for he had had refuge in our house near Glencarrig for weeks after Bothwell, and had come secretly back with Argyle—had been outlawed again, and a price set upon his head. He had been in hiding for nearly two years in the Highlands, or across the English border, and, thinking he perceived a good opportunity, had made an attempt to light up a fresh blaze at Kilmarnock. But General Drummond was too wary for him—got wind of the rising, and nipped it off in the bud. A party of Red Dragoons drew round the house where he lodged at dead of night, broke open doors and windows, and rushed up the stair. My uncle was a brave man, and fought them to the last—killed two and desperately wounded another; they could not take him alive—and the

travelling merchant who brought the news to our parish had seen his body, so gashed with wounds, and riddled by shot, and blackened with powder, that he could but just recognise it, for all he had known him many years.

“The story was long telling, for my father could not speak much at once, and mother sobbed still, for horror, I think, more than grief. By and by he said ‘Let us pray,’ and we knelt down together. It was very dark, but we had no lamp—and the lightning-sheets flashed so fast and white, one after the other, that I put up my hands to keep it from my face, and leaned against my father. The thunder rolled loudly, and his voice in prayer grew quite faint. He was just saying — will I ever forget the words!—I heard *our* Norman’s name in every one—

“‘Wherefore, O Lord, give us charity one with another—heal our grievous wounds, and teach us thy love—all the more that we see the day approaching —.’

“There he stopped, gave a groan, and then a great sigh. ‘Father, what is it? Are you ill?’ said I, and just touched him. A broad blue gleam of storm-lightning shone on his face—and I screamed loudly—crying on my mother for ‘Help, help!’ We dragged him out to the door, that the wind and rain might revive him—but he never spoke after, and the doctor said he had died of a heart-break.”

The touching story of a good man’s end, when, summoned by his heavenly Master, he had tranquilly laid

down his burden, and gone to receive the reward of his faithful stewardship, was heard by Janet in profound silence, which even after Alice ceased to speak she did not break.—The young girl laid her slight hand on the nurse's wrist.

"Janet, I am sure you know why I have told you this. Will you bear with me if I speak very plainly to you?"

Still Janet sat in the same attitude—stiffly upright, with her hands drawn round her knees, and an extraordinary expression, amounting to defiance, on her features. She had grasped, in the account of the father's death, the substance of that shadow which had begun to overcast afresh her previsions for the child; and, rather than take the stern teaching home, she was obstinately bent upon doing battle with presentiment, conviction, reason, and fact—as if her "*cannot be*" were an all-potent "*shall not be*."

"Janet," resumed Alice, on receiving no answer to her gentle entreaty, "you must not grieve for me. I know that I will one day die as he did. A voice within has long bid me turn from earth to heaven; soon it will bid me depart, and I am ready. I have been but a stranger and a sojourner here; all that I loved best are gone on before; and if, ere I have had time to feel the heat of the day, my Father command me to sit down in the vineyard, and wait until he call me home, oh Janet! why grudge me my sweet rest?"

But at this Janet started up, seized Alice in her arms, kissed her repeatedly, with a sort of fierce, wild affection—then moved rapidly in all directions about

the room, pushing away every obstacle she met; her keen eyes flashing through their grey lashes beneath the knitted overhanging brows—sobbing like a man in short sudden cries, as if each had been forced from her by the prick of a poignard.

“What is this ye’re telling me!” she exclaimed between each. “What kind o’ luve can ye bear to me, to speak o’ leaving me that’s nane but you in this weary warld? I winna believe that ye hae been brought forth into pleasant pastures to be torn frae me again when ye hae grown the dearest!—Oh! if it could be sae, I would say that God had mocked me——”

“Janet, Janet!” interceded Alice, feebly, “for pity’s sake, dinna say such things! It is shocking, it is wicked! Come here, and see if *this* be a false witness.”

She drew her old attendant towards her, and laid Janet’s hand on her side. The latter instantly turned pale, and became at once more composed—she had never felt anything like that fearful action of the heart dashing itself like a living thing against the slender bars of its cage—subsiding gradually into a slow, deep heaving, that stopped the very breath. She saw that it was her own inconsiderate burst of sorrow and anger which had brought on this attack, and, while administering in haste and fear the remedies she was accustomed to employ for relieving a faintness the cause of which she had never fully understood, she condemned herself harshly for her folly and thoughtless violence.

It became from thenceforward Alice’s task to console, support, and reconcile her companion to the prospect of her departure, in short to make the sound of

death as familiar to Janet's ear as the reality had long been to her daily contemplation. Well and tenderly did she discharge this duty, and sometimes believed that she had succeeded, not being aware that very often what she mistook for resignation was only self-command produced by regard for her comfort, and rendered more easy by wilful incredulity.

"Ye are sick and weak, burdalane," she answered, when Alice had been endeavouring more perseveringly than usual to impress upon her the baseless nature of the hopes she persisted in nourishing. "Ye hae dreamed o' the auld spae-wife's haverel rant, and o' yer faither's end (a maist virtuous and godly man, I doubtna, and a worthy ensample to ye in a' ither matters but that,) until yer silly pow is fu' o' naething else; and this noisy toun is no the place for sick folk. Wait a wee till ye get stronger, dearie, and we'll carry ye out-by yonder into the caller healsome air and green fields ayont St. Leonard's. It's a bieldy bit there, hinnie; and we'll hae ye gey blithe and bonny when my Leddy Glencarrig comes hame frae ower the saut sea to fetch ye."

"Who is dreaming now, Janet? I'll never go hence, but to be laid beside my mother; why will you not learn to believe me? True, it *is* a beautiful spot," she added, half smiling to herself, "and the white roses I planted there must be blooming sweetly now. Their last flowers will be scattered on me—and I half fancy, whiles, that I shall be glad in my quiet grave to know that they are so fair and lovely over my head. Dear Janet, do not weep—we shall not be very long

parted. I will tell *them* of your goodness, and when you meet us above they will love you for my sake. If a cup of cold water freely given deserve a blessing, think, my second mother, what you have done for me, and hope for the promised reward. I must not stay with you—but I tryst you there, Janet, in Heaven, where tears will be wiped from all e'en."

Of tears Janet indeed shed abundance—yet in truth she was only half convinced, because she *would* not be. It seemed too hard to conceive that, after tiding bravely over so tremendous an ocean, the frail little bark should sink in the harbour it had gallantly struggled to reach—it ever seems so incredible that there should be no power in the strong will, no magic in the vigilant love, of our poor humanity to arrest for one second the step of "the Shadow feared of Man"—to wrestle with the destroyer until he flee from you—to turn back on the dial the ominous wave of darkness which flows on with such sickening, remorseless steadiness, until it swallows up the single spot of brightness which is perhaps the only comfort left to the widow or the orphan—to some mourning mother, or proud, bereaved, yet tearless man. Of all the lessons which sorrow can impart this is the longest unlearned, the hardest to retain, the soonest discarded—for it is the most humbling to human pride—the most incomprehensible to human intellect—the most agonizing to human affection—"That no man can redeem his brother, nor make agreement with God for him, so that he must let that alone for ever." We read it, printed in letters of blood, by the dying bed of some

whom we have borne in our innermost hearts; but scarcely has the first anguish of each loss faded than the dearly-bought experience fades with it—and when the arm which smote before is raised to strike again, we cry afresh, “This shall not fall on us!” and idly fancy our love a shield—our strength a bulwark—our struggles, our cares, our prudence, and desires, weapons which will defend our idols from the sickness that walketh by night, and the pestilence that destroyeth in the noon-day.

Oh, vain, fond heart of man! deceiving itself where deception is so plainly what it ever must be—the warfare of the clay against the potter—the question of the vessel to Him that formed it, “Why hast thou done this to me?”

Such unfortunately was still Janet’s frame of mind, and under its influence she positively succeeded to some extent in persuading herself that Alice had greatly exaggerated whatever danger might exist—and in blinding herself to the truth that each attack, however unfrequently they might recur, prostrated Alice more and longer, and that at each assault the stealthy, unrelenting foe drew its leaguer more closely round the citadel of life.

Of Alice’s own reflections and feelings at this stage of the new existence into which she had striven through such fiery obstacles, it would be difficult to give the most imperfect record. She was indeed dying, not of that rebellious self-indulgence which shrinks from cares and duties, and hugs death as an easy asylum from sorrows which it has no constancy to brave, no root of

faith to bear, but because on the night when her trust in earthly things had been swept away like a spider's web the mainspring of existence had snapped, and the fire of that fell disease been lighted which had licked up the fresh fountains of her young life. She never repined that He who had given her many things richly to enjoy should also take away; and if she sometimes wept it was only while praying that the last stain of her error might be blotted out—the last tie to this world gently loosened—the world which had lived for her in his smile, as absorbingly and as perilously as for lower natures in the greedy pursuit of the pleasures, the gain, and the temptations by which it ensnares those who never look beyond it.

She had needed some such overwhelming event to detach her intense and passionate affections from the one object round which they had grown; and, testing her own spirit to the quick by an unfailing touchstone, acknowledged with most deep sincerity that her probation had been a very merciful one. She had not been abandoned to the slow martyrdom appointed for some—she had not been doomed to the ordeal which compels Conscience to hold the lists for months, years, perhaps a lifetime, against passion, opportunity, and all the thousand allies of the traitor Self, until, bruised, fainting, and beaten down, the champion of Heaven too often sinks insensible at last—she had not been condemned to pluck up and rend away with weak, unwilling hands from her own writhing heart every clinging fibre by which her great love had pierced the strong surface of that heart to feed on the

rich and fertile soil within, until not one nerve was left unlacerated, not one atom unground—no awful messenger had beckoned her to arise and tread a flinty road towards the mount of tribulation, and put into her hand the knife wherewith to slay what had been no less in truth than flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone, while a divine voice spoke not to stay the blow, nor gracious hand was seen to point out a meaner offering, when with strong crying and tears the required sacrifice was offered up. No. The green and stately plant which, like Jonah's gourd, had sprung up so tall and fair in a single night—the glorious tree near which she had humbly sat, content if a passing breeze only wafted to her the rich perfume of its blossom or some fleeting freshness of its shade—had perished also as the prophet's shelter—one blast had withered its stem, branch, and twig, from the topmost coronal of leaves to the lowest filament of the root; but, unlike the rebellious man of God, Alice lifted up no voice to mourn for it, but said in her childlike faith that it was well done, and blessed the fatherly loving-kindness which chastened her.

Inconsistent as it may appear, she did not wish to *forget* Lord Dundee, for in the total transmutation which her honest self-scrutiny revealed she knew that the former love had passed from her soul like dross from silver in the refiner's crucible, and that there was no danger to her perfect peace in the remembrance of all that had fed the devouring passion which once reigned over her. Her heart was now like some desecrated fane, in which, enthusiastic devotee, she had

knelt by day and night—incessantly bringing thither the best firstfruits of her thoughts, the most precious tribute of her hopes, her prayers, and her desires—seeking there the sole fulfilment of her most ardent aspirations. With one gust of its mighty breath, an earthquake had hurled down temple and graven image at once, well nigh burying the votaress under the ruins of the altar before which she had bowed herself with all-trusting adoration. From such a shock Alice had just arisen. Her idol was not broken; calm and grand as ever it lay at her feet, with its sad face and haughty eyes—but she knew it now for a thing of clay, a creature of like mould with herself; on the altar whence it had been thrown no power could replace it—at that broken shrine Alice could never worship more.

Could Claverhouse have stood before her in all his pride of beauty and genius, of chivalrous grace and manly devotion—could he have laid all this and an unfettered heart in her keeping, wooing her for the partner of his destiny, the sole sharer of his wedded love, Alice would not have turned back on the path which was leading her from the broken cisterns of that feverish happiness for which she had thirsted to the living streams which, once tasted, satisfy the soul for ever. She had entered the very Valley of the Shadow, her feet had dipped in the waters of the dark river which all must cross; and when an angel-hand gently led her back to the home which her sweet presence was to gladden for a few days yet, Alice had beheld too nearly the borders of the promised good land for all other sights and sounds not to bear strange un-

reality in her sight. As the widow's son, recalled from the dead at the prayer of Elijah, might have gazed on the scenes he revisited, marvelling much that, with all their charms, he should ever have wept to leave them, so Alice in her hours of languor and quiet meditation looked back upon the ineffaceable past—forward to the dim future—with eyes touched by a divine light, and from which the scales had fallen, as from the blind man's of old, beneath the healing touch of Him with whom is no darkness at all.

And this light was growing very near and radiant, as the chill twilight which had once saddened her path melted into the brightness of approaching day. The rugged road was smooth beneath her tread, the thorns which had pierced her tender feet were blossoming into celestial roses, the pilgrim's staff was in her hand, the pilgrim's guide a lamp to her steps; and thus, now resting awhile by the road-side, now imperceptibly but steadily advancing, she went her silent way to the Land where all things are forgotten.

No, not all things—surely not all, dear Alice! Not such sweet patience in well-doing as thine—not the faith which could say, even while the tortured flesh revolted, “Though He slay me yet will I trust Him”—not the unswerving duty which so bravely counted all things loss for conscience' sake—not the spotless purity to which a breath of evil was worse than any grief—no, not even the love which, erring as it had been, must assuredly, when sanctified by penitence and prayer, have found favour in the eyes of Him who holds Love blessed!

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

What bloody man is that? He can report,
As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt
The newest state.

This is the sergeant
 Who like a good and hardy soldier fought
 'Gainst my captivity.

MACBETH.

IN the little chamber whose two inhabitants had now no other care than the gradual progress of a decline which, still painless, grew more marked as the weeks wore on, the noisy stir of the outer world, whirling on in its restless course of strife and tumult, found but few and faint echoes; and even such as made their way to Janet's ears were prudently softened and selected before they were allowed to pass into those of Alice. The varied and contradictory details of Lord Dundee's flight from Edinburgh, as well as the dangerous aspect of affairs in general, had come to her knowledge long before it was possible for Alice to hear or comprehend them; and it had not been Janet's least anxiety that the breaking out of fresh disturbances might have a pernicious, or even fatal, effect upon the recovery of her adopted child. By the time however that the young girl's senses and memory returned, the imminence of that danger had decreased for the present, and Janet hoped that, before the tremendous storm which seemed

rising in the Highlands of Perthshire could burst over the yet peaceful country, the arrival of Lady Glencarrig would free her from all responsibility, by removing Alice, and, as she expected, herself also, beyond the remotest limit of its effects.

But the girl's disease made such rapid strides during the latter part of the month of July as to render it quite evident that any expectation of the sort would be fallacious. She continued, as ever, perfectly contented and cheerful; she had found not merely tranquillity, but happiness; and Janet, although admitting that at any instant she *might* be called upon to part from her, found in the uncertainty itself a means of hoping on. Gathering herself together, if we may so speak, she strove to look no further than the immediate present, centering and absorbing herself in the sensations and occupations of each separate hour, as if no other were to succeed it—almost preventing fear by refusing to take cognisance of the future which was to embody it—fostering this moral numbness as a safeguard against the acute suffering which must accompany a waking from it. She was precisely in the situation of a man who, while believing himself on safe ground, has, by one false step, rolled down a steep declivity, and, lying bruised yet conscious at the bottom, remembers how he had shuddered on its brink, and, astonished to find himself alive, dares not alter the position of a limb lest the motion should reveal the extent of injuries yet unfelt. Little by little, drop by drop, an infinitesimal quantity of bitterness had been daily added to her cup, as minute a portion of

sweetness withdrawn, until the whole flavour of the draught had been changed without her perceiving it.

Things were in this state when, on the first of August, the startling news of Lord Dundee's victory at Killcrankie fell like a thunderbolt upon the good town of Edinburgh. The too confident anticipations which had attended the march of Mackay, the officer sent by William's government to oppose the furious raids of Dundee and his Highland army, having been thus summarily dashed to the ground, the public mind rushed, as is always the case, to the opposite extreme, and during four-and-twenty hours terror and confusion reigned rampant, especially over those who had most reason to expect ample chastisement for their complicated treasons, and least cause to hope for leniency at the hands of the fiery Jacobite chief, whom many were aware of having personally wronged beyond forgiveness. The picture of these different fears, and the shameless timeserving which they brought to light once more in numbers of the most prominent individuals who then occupied the highest seats in the synagogue, has been preserved to us in various memoirs of the time; and the universal consternation occasioned by this single success, with the extensive consequences it was expected instantly to entail, are the most convincing argument that could be adduced of the estimation in which were held the genius and energy of the man who thus kept a nation suspended upon his breath.

Others, however, while rating him still higher, discovered in that very opinion an antidote to their fears.

"There is no danger," is reported to have been the comment of Sir John Dalrymple; "had Dundee been alive he would have brought us the first news of his own victory."

The suggestion proved correct. The rumours of Lord Dundee's descent into the Lowlands had scarcely time to spread when they were contradicted by positive intelligence of his death.

That intelligence was carried to Alice by Janet, and received by the latter with little more emotion than she displayed in speaking of her own. She even half forestalled the sentence in which, with mingled relief and admiring regret, the old dame was about to describe the fate of the brilliant but ruthless soldier, whom, as a loyalist and episcopalian, Janet had always regarded with intense respect; but to the issue of whose turbulent and warlike schemes she looked forward with much distress of mind.

"No need to tell me any more — Lord Dundee has fallen. I knew it already," she said simply, without comment, tear, or sigh.

Much pleased at having so successfully imparted a piece of intelligence which, from Alice's intimacy with his relations and personal acquaintance with himself, might have been very agitating in her weak state, Janet bustled away to discharge some household duties; the girl turned her pale face to the beautiful sunlight, and glanced upwards, saying to herself—

"One more thread to break! then, Alice, home!"

And from that day, in her brightest moods, as in

her saddest—and they were very rare—there was an expression on her countenance which was a perpetual warning to her old nurse that she would not stay long there. Mental pain seemed to have lost its power to injure; but physical exertion was now beyond her—the most she could do was to creep from her bed-chamber, leaning on Janet's arm, and sit all day long in her comfortable window-nook, unable to read more than a few minutes at once in her little Bible, but always ready with smile and look to meet her old friend's anxious eye. There was a glad serenity in that look, which often gave an additional pang to the good but narrow heart, which, sorrowing so deeply itself, smarted at the thought that no encumbrance of love for *her* could avail to clog the heavenward aspirations of a spirit ready and willing to wing its flight. She had bestowed on Alice all the love her heart contained; her calmer judgment told her how honestly and gratefully it was repaid, but she knew that others shared what few thoughts the girl still dedicated to earthly attachments, and this stung her sometimes with jealous grief, sometimes with shame for that jealousy, and a redoubled zeal in all that could hide its workings from Alice, to whom she was certain the mere suspicion of such sentiments would bring nothing but surprise and regret.

About a fortnight after the announcement of Lord Dundee's death, an overdue letter from Lady Glencarrig arrived; but as communication was then in its infancy, and the countess's epistle was dated nearly a month back, it could not of course contain any men-

tion of a misfortune equally ruinous to the King's cause and distressing to his relatives. With quiet tears of affection and pleasure did Alice peruse her warm assurances of alarm and regret at her adopted daughter's dangerous illness, and of her intention of setting out for Scotland the very instant Flora's precarious state of health would permit, to remove Alice at once and for ever to the home which was longing to receive her. Enclosed was a letter from Flora urging Alice not to lose a moment in rejoining them—even, if possible, before the countess could arrive to accompany her. The fatal intelligence which had depressed the spirits of every true Jacobite in Scotland had not been transmitted to France at the period of inditing, although later than the date of the countess's letter, and Lady Flora's overflowed with the gladsome gaiety of her bright nature—all the joys of the adored and happy wife and expectant mother. From these two centres of pure delight—the young husband so truly loved for his own sake, the coming treasure dear at once for its own and his—the whole felicity of her sunny life seemed to spring; falling crowns and tottering thrones were little to her, so that they spared those household gods! It was well and right that they should be foremost—husband and child before brother and friend; yet there was still love enough in that wide, genial heart to give even these such a portion as might satisfy the most grasping self-seeker. She besought Alice to do her best to come to her—to come in time for the baptism of her expected darling, who was to bear the doubly dear names of husband and brother, or those

as dear of mother and sister; and with a thousand sweet expressions of affection, so delicate and charming that it seemed marvellous how inanimate paper could convey them, Flora bade her adieu.

To this letter all Janet's remonstrances could not prevent Alice from writing an answer herself—to no one else could she entrust the acknowledgment of a friendship which had taken her at the cradle only to quit her at the grave. But with all her resolution it was weary work, and tears often chased each other down her cheeks when she allowed her imagination to dwell upon their grief at receiving such an answer to their hopeful proposals. Still the letter itself was beautiful in the saintly joy and resignation which had inspired its every expression; the dying girl, snatched away in the flower of her youth, at the moment when a new era seemed opening in her existence, in which wealth, comfort, and a solicitude almost maternal would have conspired to obliterate the effects of early misfortune—Alice, whom every hour was bringing nearer to what is called an untimely end, did not cast one longing glance upon the destiny of her foster-sister. Waveless and bright as seemed the ocean on which sweet Flora's bark was launched, it was still the open and treacherous sea; and, if a great tempest had indeed overtaken Alice, its fury had but hurried her more swiftly into the harbour. The shore was full in sight to her—how and when would her sister reach it?

The agitation produced by these ideas and others similar to them affected Alice so much as to prolong even harmfully the task she had undertaken. Janet

interfered quite authoritatively in consequence, but when she left the house, half an hour afterwards, on business which required her personal attendance, Alice requested Mrs. Morison (who had undertaken to bear her company) to replace the writing materials which Janet had carried off—and again the little trembling hand slowly traced line after line, between the constant fits of weakness which dimmed her eyes and relaxed her worn fingers.

This was superscribed to the Earl of Glencarrig.

“To none other but you could I address these lines—to you I now write them at my last hour, giving into your keeping a secret which your constancy and your sorrow have purchased for you a dearly-won right to know. Let it be buried with you, as but for your knowledge it will with me.

“Read what is written on the little page contained in the case you will receive with this, and the letters which stand below; call to mind all that you can remember of the time when you sought poor erring Alice for your wife, and your own generous heart will utter a name which even now I cannot write.

“Let no shadow of distrust darken his memory in your breast. He was as ignorant of my love as I of the sacred ties which bound him—in the same hour which by a most bitter yet most merciful Providence revealed to each the soul of the other, we parted—never to meet again on earth. From that hour he died to me, as utterly as I am dying now to you.

“You will not blush that for the last time I should call you by the fond word which was once my only name

for you—it has never ceased to echo in my ear and my heart, and, passing over years of separation and of sorrow, my thoughts go back to our childhood again, and my last earthly wish has been to prove a sister's love by a sister's trust, and close this farewell with a sister's kiss.

“David, *brother!* see how my tears are dropping on your dear name! Put your kind lips to this, where mine have been. I know that you have of your great goodness forgiven me the ill I wrought you, and, believe me, if there be truth in the knowledge death brings, no love less than that which sealed my soul to any other passion could have made Alice cold to yours.”

This done, she asked for the box which held her little possessions, and chose from it the silken case and the ring. These she placed with the earl's letter—folding all together with her natural dainty, careful neatness, tied the packet with a piece of silk cord from the little work-basket which she liked to keep beside her—it was a fancy she had—and was directing it to the intended receiver when Janet came home.

This setting of her house in order struck cold to the old peasant's superstitious fancy—it looked like an omen of immediate departure; and perhaps a certain presentiment that it was at hand had impelled Alice to put off no longer a preparation she had for some time wished to make. A few cheerful words however, and the circumstance that she appeared no worse than usual after a little extra fatigue, restored the balance of Janet's equanimity, and, dismissing her neighbour, she began to amuse Alice by relating an adventure which had just occurred to her—a curious one enough.

During her walk, it so happened that a friendly gossip had hailed her by name, to make inquiries about Alice, and, in spite of her haste, she could not think of refusing such information. A man who was passing had turned round and listened to their colloquy; and when Janet continued her way, had followed her so decidedly that she took upon herself to demand his business. The stranger, not at all disconcerted, made a sign expressive of the propriety of discretion, and said in a corresponding tone that if she were Janet Rutherford he would be glad of some speech with her.

"I couldna guess what the loon was ettlin' after," replied Janet, "but I'm no feared o' men, nor ever was, leastways in the braid streets, wi' the sun up and folk astir. Sae I just speired at him, what did he need wi' me? as frack as I say it till yersel', dearie."

"'Eh, cousin Janet, yer memory's wonderfu' short,' quo' he.

"'Wonderfu' short!' quo' I, 'ye're a fule that says it. How can I mind a chiel I never saw, for a' he ca's cuisin wi' me, will I nill I?'

"But he just leugh, and then I got a gude hard keek at his face. It came ower me like a sough o' by-gane times—but the name, the name! Eh! that was clean awa,' and my puir head just like a toom whustle.

"'Deil rax the craig o' ye, that plagues me so!' quo' I, 'what for do ye stand girning there? Speak out, man, wha ye may be——'

"'Hout na!' quo' he, 'dinna raise yer birse on me. Ill words suldna gang between sister's bairns, and if ye

skreigh that gate, may be I'll get my thrapple wrung by man, let alane auld Mahound. D'ye no mind Allan Johnstone?' "

" Aweel, Elsie dear, gif ye'll credit me, I glowered at him like a daft creature and couldna mind was it himsel' or his father! Nae marvel either, for I had kenned him last a little rampaging laddie, and he meets me the day a lang-leggit, swart-faced, grey-powd trooper-man, wi' a beard half lyart and half brown, and mair scars on his broo and haffits than ye could weel count. Ye maun comprehend," pursued Janet waxing fluent and warm, "that there was twa o' them, cuisins born o' mine, and no that far off kin neither, by token that their mither Letty Foster was my ain mither's sister's bairn, whilk, as ye see, he put me in remembrance o' vera discreetly. Letty o' the Happerstane she was aye ca'd, by reason that Johnnie Foster, her auld gude-sire, was a miller, a weel-to-do man and a gude ane. Letty was an orphan, and keepit the house for him whenever my puir auntie Meg that was married on Alick Foster died, and Alick himsel' lived jimp three years after that downfa'. She was a bonnie lassock, was Letty, but an awfu' spirit, and a spoiled bairn to the boot o' that—for auld Johnnie never said her nay; and the neighbours a wagged their heads and whispered that mischief would come o' ettling to be wiser than King Solomon, and never thwarting the pretty wrang-headed tawpie. And sae matters fell out whenever Allan Johnstone and his sodger men cam daikerin' doun the glen to get their lodgments; for this was in the wild riding days, ye ken,

when English troopers were scouring the country far and wide. 'Ripe whare ye list and keep as ye can,' was ilka man's creed, and wer ain canny Scots was e'en as wolves set to guard the fauld. The miller's house was a bein and cosy ane, and the miller's oe the blithest and sonsiest lassie for mony a mile round—sae Allan Johnstone fand it mair convenient dootless to hae his meat and sup made ready to his hand, wi' a seat by the ingle, and a comely damsel to fill his pipe and bicker o' yill (forbye gettin' a hantle siller intill his toom pouch for his ain occasions), than to sleep for nights on the bare hill-sides, and ride o' days in a' weathers for the glory o' swallowing sax inches o' steel, or half an unce o' lead. He was but a puir notion o' a sodger, for all he came of a brave border stock," added Janet contemptuously, "but he ware his red coat wi' a grace, and could drink and sing and dance and cock his hat agee wi' the bauldest; sae Letty, that was a fule woman, fell ower the croon o' the head into love wi' him, and he wi' her or her tocher, whilk was a braw ane, a thousand merks, nae less, Elsie! The auld man gied his consent, for Letty held him by the nose and he aye behoved to gang her gate, or she wad ha' walked it her lane, mair often than was seemly. But frae the waefu' day that she became Allan's wife—the dyvour! he garred her take his—and it was a rough ane, my conscience!"

The upshot of this long-winded but not uninteresting biography was that the miller's pretty heiress had found cause, like numberless others, to repent the precipitation with which she had entrusted herself and

fortune to an agreeable, but idle, extravagant, and selfish man: and after years of following the drum she had been obliged by his illtreatment to leave her husband and return to the home of her youth with her two children, Patrick and Allan. Hither she was pursued by her spouse, who had quitted the service, and proposed to spend the rest of his days in the enjoyment of elegant leisure, on the profits of his grandfather-in-law's thrift and industry. Several violent quarrels having resulted from a too open assertion of this laudable desire "whenever the maut gat aboon the meal," old Johnnie Foster finally in a fit of exasperation expelled Allan Johnstone from his snug billet. That gentleman revenged himself by forcing away his unfortunate wife and children from their shelter; and, after wandering with them from town to town half over Scotland in a condition of want approaching to destitution, unless when relieved by the most discreditable expedients, had found means of settling down upon a remote corner of the estates of the Grahames of Forfar. Neither father or mother survived very long, the former being drowned while crossing in a drunken state a rude plank-bridge, poor Letty Foster dying a short time after the birth of a little girl. Patrick and Allan, being both fine-grown, intelligent lads, were taken under the protection of Sir William Grahame; and when, many years afterwards, the young laird of Claverhouse left home to complete in foreign service his education as soldier and gentleman, both the brothers had accompanied him. Patrick the elder as body servant, Allan in order to enlist in whatever

regiment his young master might be appointed to join, he having from the first betrayed for the military profession a predilection unshared by his equally trusty but more pacific relative.

This cousin then was the person whom Janet had so oddly encountered; and, after bringing his family history to a comfortable close, she next went on to explain his present position. He had just returned from the Highlands, and, not feeling quite at ease as to the view which the newly constituted military authorities might choose to take of his loyalty, had been inspired with the luminous idea that his newly-found cousin might be able to provide a more retired asylum than a public hostelry could offer, for himself and a young comrade, who, besides being liable from superior station to more notice than would have been convenient, stood greatly in want of rest and nursing before he attempted to travel further, having been severely wounded at the battle of Killiecrankie. Both were at present penniless; but Allan stated that his companion had hopes of obtaining from friends and relations the protection needful to leave Scotland in safety, and the funds he required for that purpose, as his own property had been forfeited, and was then partly owned by the Earl of Crawford, partly under litigation between a third or fourth cousin of his and the Dalrymples. Meanwhile however they were almost without food or shelter. Janet's kindness of heart had not been able to withstand these representations, and she had offered to the wayworn, homeless men her own unoccupied chamber, only stipulating

that they should observe great discretion; hold no intercourse with the other inhabitants of the house, nor even leave it, except at night.

If Alice had brought to bear upon her old friend the quick observation she had formerly been used to exercise, she would inevitably have noticed that Janet held something in reserve—something that made her hurry rather confusedly over bits of her story, and gave a feigned carelessness to her manner when, in reply to Alice's question of whether she knew who Allan Johnstone's companion was, she pretended to be in want of some article at a different corner of the room; and, while rummaging in the almshouse there, answered, "Ou, he was just a sodger body like Allan, it seemed—o' the better sort, maybe; there was routh o' puir gentry folk in the ranks—she couldna say preecesely." But, while somewhat roused and interested by the lively talk of Janet, and the story of her cousin's parentage, Alice was too languid to interrogate her beyond what she volunteered to tell, and had no curiosity even to inquire what news these wanderers might have brought from the bloody field where, amidst the remnant of Scotland's loyal chivalry, its chief and leader had fallen in the blaze of victory. The jarring of earth's rude tumults was only a transient discord in the harmony which swelled more rich and perfect on her inward ear, as she closed her eyes upon surrounding scenes to soar in faith towards the Source of all love and all concord, with a spiritual beauty on her face that, as Janet said in reverent awe, "was like the kingdom o' heaven."

* * * * *

"What is that, Janet?" she asked, raising her head from the cushion on which it lay. The afternoon was drawing towards evening, and Alice had been asleep for a short time, when awakened by the trifling noise of Janet's most cautious footfall, and the opening of the door.

Vexed at the interruption to her charge's slumbers, Janet made several impatient negative gestures at the intruder. Alice repeated her question.

"Bide ye there," said she in a sharp whisper to some one outside, then, stepping on tiptoe to Alice's chair, said slightly,

"It's only Allan, the doited creature, lounderin' up hither to speir at me will I do something for him, I havena heard what. I'll just bid him begone."

"Pray do not," replied Alice. "I shall not go to sleep again. Tell him to come in, and say what he wishes; nothing disturbs me now."

"Ye are ower gude, I'm sure, Elsie," answered Janet, still with some annoyance, and, going back to the offender, who was yet unaware of the nature of his offence, gave him some advice in a very decided, though prudent tone, and ushered him in with as much impressiveness of demeanour, and perhaps as great a sense of condescension on Alice's side, as if she had been a princess giving audience to a subject.

The stalwart trooper took two strides into the chamber, making a military salute, then stopped, very much surprised and rather subdued at the sight of the young invalid, who half sat, half lay, propped up

by pillows, in the full light of the declining sun, which, illuminating her pale features with a tinge of its own warm colour, gave them a delicacy almost translucent, like that of a clear alabaster vase in which a waning lamp flashes up with fitful brightness. Her deep liquid hazel eyes, larger and darker than in her days of health, but with nothing of consumption's hectic brilliancy, rested upon the swarthy, tattered, travel-worn man with so lovely an expression of compassion and womanly sympathy, that the poet could not have desired a better realisation of the touching image,

She looked like one who sat by Eden's door,
And grieved for those who could return no more;

and the soldier was moved thereby to make his next steps as softly as if he had trod a palace floor. Finding that these had brought him in front of Alice, he again made his brief salute, and politely waited to be addressed.

"You came to see your cousin, Master Johnstone, I think," said Alice, and the voice, although very low and faint, preserved its musical cadence and high-bred modulation so distinctly that Allan tried to pitch his to the nearest approach to it he was likely to attain.

"Ay, mistress; I must crave your pardon for intruding. My cousin had not told me that you were sick."

"It is no matter, you are welcome for Janet's sake," replied the young girl. "Do not stand; nay, Janet, bid your consin be seated."

"Never fash yourself, mistress, marching all day and keeping sentry all night make standing come natural.

I only want my kinswoman's help to dress a wound for my comrade below."

Janet, previously taking the precaution to retire behind Alice's chair, made a hasty signal to her cousin, who did not observe it.

"You see, mistress, bullets were more plenty than bannocks in the place we have left, and, while I came through without a scratch, my comrade, poor lad, had more blood let out of him on that black day in Blair of Athol than he seems like to get back in a hurry; more than I've been able to nurse into him these three weeks, what with fever and fretting and forced marches when he should have had quiet; and the Highland cailleachs, with their herbs and witch-words, are no great adepts in the barber-surgeon's art. So as we walked fifteen miles yesterday on little food or none—a scrap of oat-cake and a draught of sour ale ——"

"Alas, poor fellow! how came that?" asked Alice.

"Hey, mistress! simply enow. The Spey and the Garry don't roll gold, and the richest of us had not seen the blink of a carolus for three months and more. Dundee would have sold the last jewel he possessed had there been any to buy—and we all knew that he had stripped himself of every tester to provide for us—but not even he could coin money out of slate-stones. He was poor as the poorest of his followers, fought and toiled, marched and starved with us—helped the weak and cheered the sick like a brother; we served him and the King for dear love and not for pelf, and there was not among us a heart base enough to desert him for

lack of that he could not give. Heaven help King James and Scotland now he is gone!"

Allan Johnstone passed his large hard hand from his forehead downwards, and seemed to carry away in it something which had dimmed his eye and thickened his voice a little. Janet's signals were quite unheeded, perhaps unnecessary, for Alice was more composed than herself.

"And this comrade of yours? is he very young, poor boy?" asked the latter.

"My comrade?—the——oh, ay! to be sure. Why yes, not half my age."

"And is he dangerously wounded?"

Allan drew in a long whistle, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Two bad hits. A pistol-shot in the chest—that's nearly healed though— and a sword-cut over the shoulder. He got them in our first charge for the guns; a rascally blackguard traitor, an old boon companion of mine who had donned the Hollander's livery, dealt him the blows, and I returned the civility for him by cutting the —— infernal scoundrel down to the eyes."

Janet's frowning brow and lifted finger became unmistakable here, and Allan, made suddenly sensible of his indecorous behaviour, coloured all over his sun-burnt face as he had almost forgotten how to do.

"Your pardon, young lady," he said apologetically, "our soldier tongues are mighty unruly members, as the preachers are pleased to tell us. However, as I was masterless, or my own master, I e'en took upon myself to fend for this youngster, who, being rather too

delicately bred for a course of soaking and fasting, rags and sickness to suit, is more feckless than we old campaigners, and needs a tight hand over him, and so—— and —— ”

A dead, awkward pause, produced by Janet.

“ Well, cousin Rutherford, is it yes or no? I’ve told you already that the wound won’t heal; and there is nothing like a woman’s hand in these cases, you know, mistress (to Alice). But do your pleasure.”

These four words were rather sharply uttered, as Janet had only returned a half consent, very unlike her general alacrity on such occasions of displaying her skill, for she was born a nurse, just as some people are born poets and artists.

“ I am sure this will be Janet’s pleasure, it always is to do a kind action, and she will not let the poor fellow suffer,” said Alice’s sweet voice, accompanied by a smile of entreaty to her old friend.

“ I’ll come ! ” said she shortly. Then bending over Alice, she whispered,

“ I am laith to be awa’ frae ye, Elsie dearie; ye might need me.”

“ Oh, never mind, dear Janet, it will not be for long, and little Lizzie Morison will be blythe to sit by me. You must go; only think of the poor soldier laddie! And perhaps he has a mother or a wife. If it were a son of yours in such a case?”

“ I’ll do it, to please ye,” said Janet. But it was odd that she should experience such difficulty in making up her mind to this very simple piece of good-nature.

“ Not now, cousin,” replied Allan. “ He was asleep

when I came up, thoroughly worn out, so in an hour or two will be soon enough. In fact, I reckoned upon getting a crack with you over old times—but——”

He made a move towards the door.

“Do not go away on my account,” interposed Alice.

“Stay, if you wish; you must have so much to say to your kinswoman.”

Janet was rather for dismissing him and his news at once, but upon Alice's positive assurance that they were not likely to disturb her in the least, she drew him into the inner room in order to make security doubly sure. Once there, her inherent taste for gossip did the rest; and the cousins, with their heads together, launched forthwith into an endless conversation, of which the staple was supplied by Allan's account of his adventures during the recent campaign. And, as this account contained the fate of two individuals who have figured prominently in our tale, we transcribe such passages of it as relate to them; taking the recital out of Allan's mouth, and divesting it of extraneous interruptions, as well as of the irrelevant queries, remarks, and exclamation, which arose from the excited feelings of both narrator and listener.

CHAPTER XLVII.

NEMESIS.

Few, few, shall triumph in a hero's fall !

* * * * *

I will not weep—revenge, not grief, must be—
Blood, and not tears—an offering meet for thee;
But the dark hour of stern delight will come,
And thou shalt triumph, warrior, in thy tomb.

THE ABENCERRAGE.

THE few pages which our limits permit us to devote to the following events, and the secondary rank which they must necessarily hold in a tale purporting to deal chiefly with the history of one mind and heart, forbid us to give the earlier portion of Allan Johnstone's romantic story, which might in itself have furnished a novelist with abundant materials for the exercise of his talents. Perils by flood and field, raids and forays, privations and escapes, displays of heroic gallantry and endurance as heroic, a repetition of Montrose's tactics guided by a genius equal to his in brilliancy—superior in prudence and weight—temptingly do these lie open before us; but we refer the reader, if his curiosity be sufficiently awakened on the subject, to the different histories which contain the outline of this short civil war, and pass on to the immediate point which concerns us—the fall of Viscount Dundee

at Killiecrankie, and certain circumstances which attended it.

Without pausing upon the main features of the combat, in which an army of regular troops with all the advantage of numbers, discipline, and artillery, were ignominiously routed in fourteen minutes by a half-formed body of irregular infantry and a handful of wretchedly appointed horse, we shall merely notice two or three landmarks necessary to the right comprehension of what must follow.

The whole of Mackay's force, with the exception of two squadrons of cavalry and Hastings's regiment of foot (to which, from sheer numerical insufficiency, no detachment had been opposed in the ordering of Dundee's thin line of attack), had been broken through like a straw fence by the hurricane descent of the Highland levies, and now shattered into small divisions, conquerors and conquered indistinguishable in the terrific mêlée, was bearing down the ravine from which the Lowland troops had emerged. At the first onslaught, the general and Lord Dunbarton had executed a gallant dash at the enemy's guns, which, with a little band, amounting, it is said, to no more than sixteen gentlemen, they had captured almost without loss, cutting down the gunners upon their pieces. The Earl of Glencarrig, who had distinguished himself throughout the war by his spirit and intelligence, had signally contributed to the success of this manœuvre, and received during its progress more than one severe wound. His disabled condition was remarked by Allan Johnstone, who, in his quality of life-guardsmen, and in

virtue of many martial recommendations, had made one of the chosen few selected for this service; he rode to his assistance, and after rendering it in the most effectual manner by cutting down Glencarrig's opponent, (no other than that Andrew Muir whom our readers may chance to remember by name,) seized the earl's horse by the bridle, forced him off the field, and entrusted him to two of the Cameron men, with express orders to convey him to some place of safety, he being unable from loss of blood to keep the field.

Johnstone then galloped back towards the place where the bulk of the cavalry was stationed, and saw Dundee suddenly quit his post in front of the small squadron, composed partly of volunteers and gentlemen, partly of a few veterans from his former regiment, and, riding for a short distance forwards, stand up in his stirrups, pointing with his bare sword to the total disruption of Mackay's army, which promised an easy achievement of a victory so fairly begun. His well known battle-cry rang one moment through the wild yells, groans, and roaring tumult of the already distant combat; one moment only the brilliant form, mounted on the black charger which he had chosen for that day, stood out luminous in the evening glory—and, glittering in scarlet, steel, and gold, with its dark streaming locks, uplifted arm, and fiery eye, printed itself upon the gaze like some incarnation of the Genius of war—then, in obedience to that soul-thrilling call, came a rush of half the horsemen; a whirlwind of smoke and dust swept over the spot where he had been—when it cleared away, that place knew him no more.

Those who had not immediately responded to his summons to advance believed him to be at the head of the detachment which had charged, and after a slight vacillation, the cause of which does not seem to have been ever understood, galloped off to his support, following nearly the same line as the rest. The whole forces engaged, Highland and Lowland, were now one mass of flight and pursuit below the open space of meadow land on which Mackay's array had been drawn out at the commencement of the engagement—the dead and wounded were all that remained on the confined plain; but, while material force triumphed, the guiding mind which had prepared that triumph, and which alone could have turned it to account, was absent. Stricken to death, Dundee lay stretched on the ground, his startled horse neighing beside him, and Allan Johnstone, the only man present who had observed his fall, sustaining him just as he had sunk when the flying shot pierced his side and he had dropped from the saddle.

Wild with consternation, the soldier snatched from his master's breast the green silk scarf which, according to the popular superstition attached to the name of Grahame, had been the primary cause of this catastrophe, and with a bitter execration tore it into fragments, scattering them to the winds. He then strove to close the orifice and stanch the blood which gushed in torrents over the viscount's polished cuirass at every gasping breath, for, although apparently insensible, he was not really so—and, as Allan unfastened the braces of his corslet and removed the heavy headpiece, Dundee

slowly opened his melancholy eyes, those strange, shadowy eyes, so intensely deep in the pallor of his fated face, and asked,

“How goes the day?”

“They shout below, ‘God save King James’—the day is won, and Scotland lost!” replied Johnstone, gloomily.

“If all is well for my King, then I am well also,” said the chivalrous Grahame, and with that a sharp convulsion passed over his features, and he fainted away on the broken, trampled heather dyed with his own blood.

Allan, driven to extremity, sprang up and stared round for some means of reviving the ebbing life of which every minute was so precious. Snatching up the viscount’s steel bonnet, he darted at full speed towards a little mountain-stream which dashed and sparkled along to join the foaming Garry. It might have been some two hundred yards distant, and the soldier, springing and stumbling over the dead and dying who lay more thickly strewn at every step, reached it in an instant. He was kneeling down to dip the helmet into the cool brown stream, when a sound smote his ear, ominous of hate as the war-whoop of the Red Indian on an enemy’s trail.

“How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished! even the shield of the mighty, which is vilely cast away!”

Then a clear, mocking laugh, like the exultation of a fiend.

The trooper bounded to his feet, dropping in his

startled haste the steel cap filled with water, and shading his eyes with his hand from the few level beams which yet shot athwart the battle-scene, glanced hither and thither to discover whence the voice proceeded; but no one was near—and the sound had seemed to rise at his very elbow. Far away and farther every instant the whirling rush of strife was raging—the varied slogans of the Highland victors bursting at intervals into one simultaneous yell which distance could scarcely subdue—the irregular rattling of the running fire by which Hastings' regiment still endeavoured to check the carnage, the clash of arms, the sharp ringing of steel on steel as the long claymores rose, swept, and sank cleaving their bloody furrows through the jammed-in and struggling herd—the shouts of the pursuers, the vain rallying cries of the vanquished, and the shrieks of the slain, mown down by the tremendous sickles of those fierce husbandmen, filled the air with a deafening chorus, floating up in one sullen roar, in which nothing was distinct but a furious intensity of direst human passions wrought up to their most ungovernable pitch. No ordinary voice could have pierced the clamour when that which we describe made itself heard; yet it rose above all, solemn and bitter as if the whole significance of the dreadful war-sounds afar off had been gathered into those words and uttered itself in the grand Scripture language.

“Curse you for a fool!” muttered the trooper as he again stooped to the stream—“your chief and master dying yonder, and you——”

“Thy crowned are as the locusts, thy captains as

the grasshoppers! Behold them, the bitter and hasty ones who marched through the breadth of the land to defile it with blood and possess themselves of dwellings which were not theirs—whose horses were swifter than leopards and fiercer than ravening wolves! Behold him, the chief of all thy strength, who tempted the Most High in the swelling of his pride and was so holden with vanity! behold him, son of Belial! where is now his glory and the beauty of his comeliness—the power of his right arm and the might of his harness? Aha! tell it in Gath, that they may rejoice whom he hath smitten—publish it in the streets of Askalon, that the idolatrous daughters may weep whom he led captive in their own imaginings! How are the mighty fallen!”

By this time doubt or mistake were ended, for right before him, on the opposite bank of the runnel, a figure, unearthly or human—he hardly knew which—had started to sight on the square summit of a huge rock of basalt—standing as on a pedestal against the background of dense birch and alder which fringed that side of the stream. A gaunt, weird figure, colourless in hue and garb, with pale, streaming hair, and eyes burning with the ferocious light which glows in the eyes of a hunted tiger. He had been, when Allan first perceived him, leaning on a long gun, but as his denunciations grew more fast and furious, he dashed it down and flung up his thin arms, invoking Heaven's witness to his maledictions; then as he concluded stretched out the right, pointing, with the same laugh of terrible derision, towards the bleeding, prostrate form of Lord Dundee.

As soon as Allan's stupefaction gave place to cooler rage, the meaning and truth of this savage jubilation rushed upon him at the same moment as the identity of the fanatic speaker. His soldier's eye measured with instinctive rapidity the distance and position from which the fatal bullet had flown to do its work of death—even the attitude in which it must have been received was present to him. By no loyal hand then, in the thick of fight, by open and honourable means, had his master's destruction been compassed, but by the treacherous shot of a cold-blooded, lurking, cowardly fanatic! Dumb with fury, he snatched a pistol from his belt and took aim at the vaunting avenger—it missed fire; he drew a second—that had been already discharged into the body of Andrew Muir during his successful rescue of Lord Glencarrig. He hurled the heavy weapon furiously at the head of the wild figure before him, it whirled by the fanatic's ear and was lost in the thicket behind: and Allan, left with no arms but his sword and dirk, both useless across the deep, rocky water-course, gnashed his teeth at the strait to which he was reduced, with no alternative but to forsake his dying master or allow that master's murderer to escape scot free.

"Aha! aha!" shrieked the enthusiast again, in a voice high and shrill as a woman's, "thou art caught in thine own net, Philistine! Call on thy valiant chief to avenge the insults offered to his great name! draw the bow and the spear to slay the messenger of wrath who hath smitten him that he rise up no more to vex the meek upon earth! Dost thou know who

breaketh the bow and knappeth the spear in sunder? Dip the water, poor baffled fool! carry it to him, ere torments seize him where there shall be none to dip a finger to cool his tongue! All the streams of Damascus, the goodly rivers Abana and Pharpar, could not give him ease! Wilt thou plant for me one thorn more in his breast? Ask him if he remember the night of the sixteenth of March!"

The utter impotence to which Allan was reduced made him writhe beneath these impious curses, as if a stream of molten lead were being showered on his bare flesh—but assistance was at hand. Away to his right, at a short distance, appeared the two young Cameron men to whom he had committed the charge of Lord Glencarrig, and who, after conducting that nobleman to a place of safety, were hurrying along at full speed, hot and eager for the fray, to join the battle in the dark ravine below, and retrieve in their fellow-clansmen's eyes the time ingloriously lost.

"Hoigh! Connuil, Alaster!" he shouted.

The brothers stopped, and came towards him—the trooper continuing to shout in Gaelic some short sentences, in which Lord Dundee's Highland appellation occurred two or three times. The young men, uttering one hoarse, guttural cry, repeated the words, and rushed up to him with excited gestures, while Allan told in his fierce, breathless haste of the extraordinary apparition he had just beheld. It had vanished from its exalted station after the last speech we have recorded, sprung down the reverse side of the slippery rock, and glided like a snake through the dense under-

wood. Connuil and Alaster, who had remained half-stunned with bewilderment when Allan's exclamation first made them aware of the viscount's fall, were inflamed to the most vehement fury by his subsequent information, and, seizing each other's hands, swore a solemn oath to taste neither food nor sleep until they had tracked the assassin, and glutted their vengeance for the fate of Lord Dundee, who possessed over these half-civilized races the same power and fascination as that formerly exercised by Montrose. Allan waited no longer, but, as the Highlanders dashed with bare limbs into the bed of the narrow torrent to begin their search for the fugitive, hastened to his master—extracting what miserable satisfaction he could from the certainty that there was not the remotest possibility of escape for the fanatic, thus dogged by two hunters staunch as blood-hounds, agile as deer, acquainted with every ravine, hill, and corrie, every cavern, forest, and glen, between Strathspey and Athol.

It was night, or what would have been night in a more southern latitude, when the Highland army, satiated with slaughter, gave up the pursuit—and Dundee's friends, alarmed at his disappearance, came back to seek him, and find him, as their fears had presaged, mortally wounded. He was still alive, but unable to speak, and fainted again as, amidst loud lamentations, they raised him from the reddened sod and conveyed him slowly from the field to the old castle of Blair Athol, which then stood, a stone tower of simple construction, at a considerable distance above the pass. There the council of war had been held

on the morning of that memorable day— thence the chiefs had issued to assume the command of their respective divisions, each at the head of his clan; now they retrod the vale again, victorious, yet their victory turned to mourning, and deposited their melancholy burden in the rude hall. Here—on the very spot where, rejecting all entreaty of the wise old Cameron, Evan of Lochiel, Dundee had rashly refused to avoid a danger which all would expect to see him share—he was laid down to die, to linger through the short summer night, to expire with the early dawn.

Lord Glencarrig arrived at Blair Castle within an hour after his unfortunate kinsman, and not the pain of his wounds, nor the violence of his grief, which was aggravating bodily injuries already sufficiently serious, could prevail upon him to quit the viscount's couch until the last sigh had passed, and all was over. Not even then indeed. All that his friends could obtain was that he should allow some simple dressing to be applied, and then take a few hours' rest on a pile of fresh-gathered heath spread upon the floor and covered with a coarse plaid. They hoped that he might sleep, but he could only turn his face into the shadow of the wall, and, stifling his sobs in the mossy bed, weep his heart away for the loss of one whom he loved with a love passing that of woman.

Call it unmanly, childish if you will, proud stoic, creature of iron fibre and seasoned grain. Be it so, I will not gainsay you—for I have never sought to depict him as other than he was. His was no Spartan nature, to tread down its own griefs and stand erect

upon them; but one of simplest mould, beautiful to those who knew both its weakness and its strength—clinging and trustful as a child's, with all a man's fire and all a woman's constancy—a soul living exclusively in its self-created atmosphere of love and friendship. And now the half of that life, the half of what had nourished and sustained it, was extended straight, cold, inanimate, within three feet of him! Oh, stoic! when you beheld the corpse of your *first* friend, of him who was your second and dearer self—when you saw the glance grow dim that never turned on you but to brighten—the lips stiffen that never moved but to draw your heart with their every smile—the listless hand fall unresponsive that had been stretched forth every day to meet yours, and whose lightest pressure was an eloquent promise of unchanging, unchangeable truth—say, was your firmness then other than the stay of a bruised reed? And if you have indeed witnessed all this with unwet lashes, and steady lip, and even breath, be sure that your largest share of life's great lesson is yet unlearned, or has been taught in vain—you have not tasted the real bitterness of that cup which unveils the eyes of those who drink it to behold the world disrobed of its tawdry bravery, standing in its bare skeleton nakedness—you have never yet felt upon your heart the grasp of that unsparing agony which has ere now wrung blood from what seemed of stone—more intolerable than the dull grief said to lie too deep for tears—which, if anything less than Infinite Love had power to work that miracle, might take away the sting of death.

However profound and sincere may have been the regret and consternation which the loss of Lord Dundee had inflicted on his friends, there were on the present occasion circumstances which made it doubly disastrous—in this sense at least, that it doubled the difficulties with which his successors had to contend. Had the Highland army been vanquished on that 27th of July, their task (paradoxical as it may seem to assert it) would have been simple enough, as in that case each man would have fled to his tent, and, safe from the attacks of Lowland soldiery in the then inaccessible fastnesses of an almost unexplored region, have defied all attempts to reduce or punish their rebellion. But now, in the intoxication of so signal a victory, mad with grief and fury at the loss of their commander, yet intractable to any meaner authority, the confusion was such as to task the utmost energies of the surviving chiefs and noblemen to maintain even a semblance of subordination—discipline, in our modern acceptation of the term, was out of the question. The conquering host, divided between the opposite duties of rendering the last offices to their slain kindred, and pillaging the baggage of the flying foe, which had been completely abandoned on the field, resembled rather a horde of defeated stragglers than warriors capable of winning such a fight as that attested by the appearance of the battle plain and defile. To reduce this chaos to serviceable order would have been a hard matter even to the indomitable activity and all-pervading influence of Dundee; we need not say that, under the management of Colonel Cannon,

a half-bred, inexperienced soldier, with no knowledge greater than a desultory campaign in Ireland could furnish, it was a hopeless one. Yet this officer held by the gift of James a rank which empowered, nay obliged, him to assume after Lord Dundee the generalship of an army which nothing but the most consummate knowledge of character, the most brilliant military talents, and the most singular personal influence had enabled the viscount to maintain in tolerable cohesion and use to efficient purpose.

On the day after the battle, the necessity for some kind of re-organization had become so incontestible that every man in authority, down to the humblest of the petty chieftains who had brought their vassals to the rendezvous at Blair Athol, was forced to use his most strenuous efforts to compass that result. It was no time for the indulgence of private feelings, or even for allowing the ordinary forms of social intercourse to minister to such indulgence; the hearts of the valiant gentlemen who had surrounded the deathbed of their gallant leader were none the less truly with him that under the compulsion of public duty they left his remains unguarded save by two or three venerable old men and his attached servant Allan Johnstone. They did as, had he been still able to command, he would himself have bid them do.

The morning was cloudless and lovely without, and through the small grated, unglazed windows of which the shutters had been left open for air the balmy resinous scent of the dewy woods floated into the chamber where those rude but honest mourners sat.

The aged Highlanders, collected in a small group at the lower end of the apartment, whispered together in short sentences, recalling the days of their prime, when they had fought under Montrose and seen him snatched from them like this his successor—muttering curses upon the hand which had fired the fatal shot, and lamentations for the black fate which had spared so many a valueless existence to descend, sudden and ruthless, on the head of Ian Dhu. Allan took no share in their discourse; he had seated himself on the foot of the bed, with his arms folded and his chin sunk on his breast; his eyes had been bent for some time on the young earl, who slumbered at last upon his rustic couch, but that the mind shared little of the body's rest was plainly shown by the heavy frown, the restless hands, and by the constant sighs which escaped him.

“Bah! a boy—a child! he'll soon forget!” thought the soldier. “This sorrow that blazes up like dry thatch goes out as soon—no fear for him!”

Then he looked at what lay before him, and groaned in his spirit, and cared no more to look elsewhere.

Allan Johnstone was no poet, no sentimentalist, no tender-hearted youth, not even such an one as Lord Glencarrig; nothing in the world, reader, but a matter-of-fact trooper, as unscrupulous in an ordinary way as most of his class; who had seen, and probably caused, as much suffering as any man in that array—and death, which from the contempt bred by familiarity had long ago been stripped of its terrors, had also lost most certainly all the sobering and chastening effects which it produces upon finer and less hackneyed minds. Com-

rade after comrade had met it by his side, in his arms, at his feet, without other funeral oration than a "Poor fellow!" or "Pity for him!" followed perhaps by a coarse jest—yet near the corpse of this man, neither friend, equal, nor companion, the trooper sat, hardly able to draw his breath through the tightened throat and swelling chest, with a gloom on his strong features that lowered more deeply, a nervous pressure of the teeth on the nether lip that grew sterner every minute.

During thirty years he had not quitted that master's side whom he had first known as a child when he, a sturdy, active youth, entered the household of Sir William Grahame of Claverhouse. Thirty years! No holiday service that; no venal obedience, bought for wages and gift, thrown off for the temptation of higher fee; no common bond of hirer and hireling, dissolved by a harsh command on the one side, an insolent reply on the other, with less regret than attends the dismissal of a worn-out horse or worthless hound. Allan had tended his master when an infant, watched over him in boyhood, obeyed him blindly and unquestioningly in maturity; admired, looked up to, almost idolized him always. Claverhouse was the only man for whom he had ever experienced admiration and awe—and these feelings survived the power which had inspired them. While he and his lord were together above ground, Allan was pledged to him, his servant still; and one piece of duty he had it in his mind to accomplish, which alone prevented his envying the fortune of the brother who had shielded Dundee's life at the cost of his own.

How long it delayed that opportunity of working out to the very last the allegiance he owed to the heroic dead! Had his messengers proved false or feeble? or had Chance resolved against him this once too? He gnawed his lip more fiercely, until the blood started, and the craving for vengeance seethed up more hotly than ever at the aspect of that white, still face, from which even its rich native tinge of transparent brown had faded—the head a little raised, half buried in its own loose clusters of silken hair; the long curls soiled with dust and clotted with blood; one hand being still pressed over the death-wound through which the red, warm tide had drained away with such cruel haste. But, whatever agony had attended the parting hour, all sign of it had long since fled from the features, on which a rounded softness like the bloom of earliest manhood had replaced the sunken lines of privation and toil; the fair brow was calm and unfurrowed as a child's; a tender hand had closed the dark eyes, and their raven lashes lay black as night on the ivory cheek; the faintest shadow of a smile yet curled the exquisite mouth and lifted the haughty nostril; beautiful to the last, the stern soldier seemed reposing—

Like a warrior on his shield,
Waiting till the flush of morning
Breaks along the battle-field.

* * * * *

Voices nearer than and different from those which might be heard in various directions without, issuing orders and repeating the numerous gathering-cries of the clansmen, sounded at the open gate, and Allan

fancied his own name was pronounced. He rose, opened the door, and perceived at the further end of a wide arched corridor which led from the great hall to the main entrance of the tower a tall figure which had just challenged the sentry. Connuil Cameron—for he it was, the elder of the two brothers—made him a rapid, imperative signal, accompanied by half a dozen words in Gaelic. Allan's reply, delivered in the same language, was still more laconic: he turned back to bid one of the veterans assume his place, cast a half-contemptuous, hesitating look upon the earl—then, as he strode past the low bed, stooped over the senseless remains, and whispered,

“ Master! do *you* not know whither I am going?”

And while those who stood by stared at each other as if they fancied him mad, he departed, and went out on to the open terrace before the castle, where the young Cameron was waiting.

Without exchanging a single syllable the two men set forward together; Allan putting no questions, the Cameron offering no remark. They quite understood each other without communication. One and the same idea was in both minds—one and the same intention in both souls—and Allan knew that the Highlander would not have returned to him, his mission unfulfilled. Only once, surprised at the distance they had traversed, being then nearly two miles south of Blair Castle, he inquired how far they were from their destination, and received no answer.

The path they were treading had gradually risen, and become so narrow as to form a mere ledge on the

face of the gigantic and almost perpendicular cliff. On the left the mountain rose sheer and abrupt, scarce affording a footing to a few stunted shrubs; on the right it sank, although less suddenly, to a dizzy depth, each fissure and shelf clothed with such trees as could flourish in the poor soil; while below, all dimly seen through the intervening foliage, roared the whirling rapids and brimming pools of the dark Garry. It required the greatest agility and steadiness to step safely along this dangerous natural road, entirely unindebted to artificial improvements, in some places little more than three feet wide, in others cut through by narrow chasms which had seamed the rock almost from top to bottom. Connuil, to whom such goat-tracks were an every-day walk, held on without the slightest trepidation at a pace which his companion found it very difficult to follow, unaccustomed as he was to active pedestrian exercise, and encumbered by a dress which, although considerably simplified from the elaborate accoutrements of his former military costume, could not yet rival the lightness of tartan kilt and deerskin sandals; but the energy of his hatred and burning impatience carried him on, and he was seldom far behind his younger and better-equipped guide. At last the ledge grew broader, and opened out into a slip of tableland entirely overgrown with birch and oak, through which they were obliged to fight their way, so dense were the low, sprouting boughs, which no knife had ever trimmed, nor hand trained. This conducted them for about half a mile further, until, by such glimpses as Allan could obtain through the thickness of the wood,

they appeared to be approaching the entrance of the defile which had resounded the previous night with such an uproar as to drown the rushing voice of the torrent, which now came alone and distantly to the ear. He could just see sufficient to indicate that they were standing over the ground where the viscount had fallen, and, looking down through the virgin forest to where tiny patches of pale meadow-grass betrayed that ill-omened spot, Allan renewed with fresh determination his oft-ratified oath that, let it cost life and soul at once, he *would* have what he sought.

"Thou hast Saxon blood in thy veins, trooper," said the young Cameron, who, instead of hastening on as he had hitherto done, was, rather to Allan's surprise, standing beside him, and now looked suspiciously at his face. "Does the Sassenach know what revenge means?—what the Gaël means by it?"

There was doubt, almost irony, in the tone of this little query.

"Ay, my honest lad," replied Allan (the quick, scornful smile would have been as conclusive an answer). "We borderers, Sassenach and mongrel race as you choose to hold us, have certain traditions of our own quite as agreeable and spirit-stirring to an injured man as any you Highland folk are wont to pride yourselves upon—tales, to wit, of a hated clan cut off root and branch, of blazing homesteads and harvests fired at reaping-time, of enemies shot down at their own ingle-nook, or, better still, left sitting alive amongst the smoking ruins of hearth and home—before the bodies of wife and bairns, father and mother. There is hot

blood in us, never fear, young man, that is not likely to turn to lukewarm water at sight of a foe."

"How will you have him die?" asked Connuil. "By these?"—he touched Allan's pistols.

"No, that were a soldier's death, and he is a pitiful cur. Is he here?" continued Allan. "Why have we stopped in this place?"

Connuil turned on his heel, beckoning to the other to follow, and plunged into a belt of wood so apparently impenetrable that Allan had not expected to see him proceed any further in that direction. The Highlander however crept through the brushwood on his hands and knees, his companion imitating his example, and, on rising, both emerged into a small circular clearing, in which, as on a natural theatre, the concluding scene of a tragedy was to be played. It might have been thirty yards or so across, and was fenced in by a single row of trees, through the intervals between which a great extent of the valley and defile could be viewed northward and southward, for the clearing occupied the summit of a projecting cliff which resembled an immense pillar grafted into the mountain side. The gigantic old birches that for centuries had braved the tempests which sweep that sulken gorge, nearly met over head, and threw deep blue shadows on the turf and bracken which carpeted the little amphitheatre, while the stainless azure of the summer sky, the uncertain sparkling of the golden-green light through the dancing leaves, the delicate hues of harebell and wild rose, the diamond sheen of the heavy dewdrops just beginning to exhale with the

morning heat, the delicious aromatic breath of moss and fern, of heath and briar, all had combined to create here a trysting-place of tender love, a spot for happy vows and pure delight, nay even for grateful prayer and solemn worship, rather than for any such scene as we have to describe. Why must it be that man's evil passions should so often defile and desecrate the loveliest of nature's hiding places, which she makes for a beauty and a joy to them, and not a shamble to be polluted with their own blood and that of their fellows?

Beauty, joy, colour, harmony, perfume, all the varied perfections of the little glade, hollowed out by the Creator's hand in the thickest depths of the murky forest as a temple to His own glory, were utterly lost upon those who entered it, panting like hounds upon the scent of their quarry; not less upon the senses of their condemned foe, bound hand and foot to a tree upon the side opposite to that by which they arrived; Alaster Cameron extended on the fern, guarding him with eye alert and hand on the long claymore which lay across his knees. The slight rustle of the underwood had been plain to the youth's practised ear for some seconds before it would have been perceptible to a less cultivated organ, and, when his brother and Allan sprang into the enclosure, he was already on his feet, but did not advance to meet them, remaining near the prisoner, as if his watchfulness were indispensable to prevent any attempt at flight.

Connuil and Johnstone came together across the platform of rock; and with the white foam on his

trembling lip, the lurid passion-glow on his rugged, swarthy brow, the soldier confronted the man who had slain his master.

The fanatic's gaze sustained his boldly.

"So, child of wrath! who has conquered now?" said the Covenanter with a sneer. "Thou art come with thy dogs of war to hunt for the precious life; can that buy back to earth the minion of hell, or redeem his forfeit soul from the gripe which has rent it away in his fulness of guilt?"

Alaster Cameron raised the hilt of his dirk to strike the prisoner over the mouth, but Johnstone arrested his arm. Too strong to heed either taunt or boast, was the dark fixed purpose which he was preparing to accomplish—the executioner on the scaffold is not more callous to the criminal's imprecations and despair.

"Make your peace with Heaven, if you can, you have so much time as the shadow of yonder tree-trunk will take to reach the white stone."

"What peace can a man need to make with a God in whose service he has lived, in whose honour he dies? Slay the body as ye have slain those of the saints, and given them to be meat to the fowls of the air—the soul defies ye! And *I* defy and curse and spit upon ye, one and all!"

Connuil and Alaster stood a little apart; Johnstone folded his arms and did the same; the three counting and watching as the shade of the tree-stem to which Allan had pointed moved over blade after blade of grass, and touched frond after frond of emerald fern. The little hand's-breadth was all covered, then the blue

transparent darkness rose over the white fragment of stone and rested upon it. The prisoner's thin lips had not opened, nor his cold eye been lifted once towards Heaven, when his judges drew near and hemmed him in, their polished dirks glittering before him.

The sharp edge of steel suddenly severed the leathern thongs which had confined his wrists and ankles, and, instead of finding the three blades sheathed in his bosom, he stood up a free man.

Free! loosed from his bonds, with such a chance for his life as one man can have against three. The indomitable instinct of self-preservation which fanaticism itself could not so utterly quench as to destroy its vitality at such a crisis, made him, as the ties fell off his limbs, bound forward like an enraged panther—he was dashed back by a stout arm, and a dagger at his throat. He turned madly to the right, to the left—still with the same desperate energy; on the right and the left, as well as in front, the immoveable steel met him, on each side one of the Camerons, before him Allan Johnstone, either of them twice his match even if disarmed, behind, at three or four feet distance, a yawning precipice.

Why had they freed him? why not have taken his life at once if they wanted it? why not take it now? why did they linger, glaring on him with red flashing eyes and set teeth, but without bringing their weapons one quarter inch nearer to his breast? Those ferocious eyes fascinated him horribly, and the cold death-sweat burst from every pore as he saw that the daggers had not touched him, because, as by imperceptible lines

they encroached, he, with gaze riveted on his foes, and limbs moving heavily as those of one half turned to stone, was as steadily drawing back to the broken verge of the abyss.

Horrible! horrible! the axe, the cord, the poignard, torture itself, would have been easy to endure, he had braved them all, but to die by *such* a death, to be driven into it living and conscious, inch by inch, as it were by his own act and deed—murdered, yet well nigh a suicide! He threw a wild, shuddering glance behind him, and in his agony leaped upon Allan's dirk; in the struggle to tear it away, perhaps to use it on himself, maiming his hands frightfully. Foiled in this, he tried again to break the circle of steel, and again the three relentless avengers drew their tinkel closer and closer round the victim at bay. The yard-wide space, fought for by hair's-breadths, was all swallowed up, and in an awful silence they paused with their feet on the very brink.

Then Allan Johnstone spoke.

"For my master—for my brother. My debt is paid."

Two dagger-strokes went with the names—deep, ferocious, but not mortal; *that* would have delivered the wretched victim from the worse horror which awaited him.

"Take my gift, murderer of our chief!"

"And mine, whelp of a Sassenach dog!"

The blood sprang over the dagger-hilts from four reeking wounds; the fanatic's face writhed into an appalling expression of hatred and despair, yet he stood

a moment erect. Then, like an uprooted tree, he reeled round, and, tossing his arms aloft, fell—fell—God only knows how long, how far, in that fearful chasm; one prolonged shriek piercing the rich, summer air, as the corpse (it could scarcely have retained life beyond the first few seconds) dashed headlong and mutilated over every jutting crag—staining with its blood every sharp, bare edge of rock—to disappear, a shapeless, mangled heap, amongst the massy woods, three hundred feet below.

* * * * *

This was Allan's tale, in substance such as we have told it, with the addition of some details which he could not give, and the omission of others we cared not to introduce. The awe-struck Janet was still listening when it had been already some moments concluded. How much had been overheard by Alice was very doubtful, for she lay just as they had left her, and seemed dozing quietly. Janet, after peeping cautiously to make sure of this, shook her cousin by the arm, and, putting a pair of very unsteady lips to his ear, said,

“The fearfu' creature ye sent to his reckoning—the reckoning ye'll need to gie for him, wild man-slayer that ye are—was her brither, Allan Johnstone!”

Allan started, and pushed back his stool involuntarily.

“Are ye a witch, old wife?” he asked.

“Did ye ken it yoursel', man? Tell me that.”

“Ay; but only whenever I saw the girl, and just put together this, that, and the other, that I had picked up from his lordship by accident——”

“Haud yer fule jaw, wi’ yer *lordships!*” exclaimed Janet, in a savage undertone, “the hearing o’ him being in this house is just the vera thing to kill her outright. Had *he* nae part in this sinfu’ sheddin’ o’ blood, for whilk ye will hae a dear account to render?”

“Account or none!” answered the trooper, with flashing eyes, “it was *done!* it *is* done, and I would not undo it to save my soul!”

“The Lord forgie ye, for ye kenna what ye say, man,” remonstrated the scandalized Janet.

“I know this—that had yonder cursed hound’s miserable carcass contained, not only his own existence, but that of all the fanatics in Scotland, I would only the more joyfully have taken every one to purchase an hour of life for Dundee! I would!”

And therewith he rose, striking his clenched fist upon his knee, with an oath; and walked noisily and heavily into the other room. His asseveration had been pronounced in so violent a tone as to awaken Alice.

“I have slept so pleasantly, and been dreaming. I told you you would not disturb me,” she said to Janet, as the latter went to her, almost afraid to show her face under the half-guilty consciousness of the dreadful secret just communicated. “How long have you been gone?”

“I hae been here by ye, hinnie, but I’m just ganging doun the stair noo wi’ Allan there, that’s wakened ye wi’ his tramping and roarin’; the grit, unchancy loon! Get out, and I’ll come to ye at the stair-head o’ the under flat; ye’re like the lave o’ men—aye doing mair

mischievous than good!" said the irascible old woman, in whom any sort of grief or displeasure invariably produced temper, excepting towards Alice.

Allan did as desired, after an obeisance to Alice, into which he contrived to infuse as great an amount of respect—perhaps of admiration—as his general manners permitted. Janet installed Lizzie Morison, an intelligent child of eleven, as temporary attendant upon the invalid, with strict orders to summon her, unhesitatingly, if anything unusual were required.

"Cousin Janet," said the trooper, as he followed her down the seemingly interminable turnpike, which the descent of each successive floor involved in greater obscurity, "what the devil seized you to make such a pother about doing this bit job for his lordship, poor lad, especially as you must have known the countess and her daughter, since it appears they were great patronesses of yonder pretty girl. Pity she has so short a time to live."

"Ask me nae questions, and ye'll hear nae lees," replied Janet, sullenly; but with that sullenness which is rather the exponent of pain than of anger.

"Humph!" grunted Allan, "You'll never lack wind to cool your brose for all you waste on civil speeches to me, kinswoman. But, od's my life! that's a lovely creature! Poor thing! so young too! The great devil roast me in my own ribs if I don't think her just like an angel!"

"It's few enough o' angels ye'll ever get leave to see if yon's the gate ye speak of them or to them, ye profane, hellicate swearer!" was the retort—which

would have been laughable had not the meaning of the reproof been so respectable.

“Gif ye name her name—or sæ muckle as speak o’ havin spoken wi’ her before the airle, I’ll just start ye out on to the plainstanes to get bield and bit as ye can—baith o’ ye,” said Janet, as a final admonition to her much-enduring kinsman, as she pushed him on in front along the passage towards her room.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ONE TAKEN, THE OTHER LEFT.

Ben se' crudel, se tu gia non ti duoli
Pensando ciò ch'al mio cor s'annunziava
E se non piangi di che pianger suoli ?

DANTE.

Bear up thy dream, thou mighty and thou weak !
Heart strong as death, yet as a reed to break,
As a flame tempest-swayed !

THE HOME OF LOVE.

A SLIGHT, stooping figure which had been seated with its back to the door, arose at their entrance, and, recognising Janet Rutherford, acknowledged her presence with the courtesy which a true gentleman never omits to pay to a woman, be she ever so humble in station or unattractive in person. It showed most gracefully beneath the coarse, ragged coat—the spoil of one of Mackay's prisoners, which had probably been a welcome prize to the once gay and elegant Earl of Glencarrig. A poor garment, too large for the present wearer, of faded red, faced and cuffed with blue, and looped with common yellow braid, the original hues almost undistinguishable from stains of every kind; his shoes were very heavy, yet nearly worn through; his fine linen positively in rags; nothing left of the whilome butterfly gallant but the carefully-combed jet-black locks, which were still as shining and well-tended as in his palmiest days. This was the only point on which the delicate self-respect of high breeding

had found room to exercise itself, and had not failed to do so.

Janet returned the young nobleman's polite greeting with a low, but very stiff, obeisance; and, pursing up her mouth into an expression of obstinate reticence, betook herself to the business on hand with an imperturbable physiognomy.

The wound which she had undertaken to examine was really a severe, and lacked little of being a very dangerous, one. It crossed the left shoulder a little outside the collar-bone, and penetrated some way into the breast, so as to give considerable reason to fear that the lungs were attacked. It was only partially healed; and the continual fever bred by pain and fatigue had evidently been a very bad visitor to a constitution impaired by undue exposure and deprivation of those comforts which the luxury of his former habits of life had rendered absolute necessities. Under any other circumstances than those in which she imagined herself, the kind old woman would have been moved almost to tears by so afflicting a change in a youth born to the promise of ease and splendour; but Janet, being as uncompromising to her supposed enemies as devoted to her real friends, and regarding Lord Glencarrig as the sole primary cause of Alice's sorrows, considered herself in duty bound to repress any risings of compassion, and feel as harshly towards him as it is morally possible for a woman to do towards a man dependent upon her feminine tenderness and good offices.

Glencarrig himself, perfectly aware that he was under

the same roof as Alice, had experienced the greatest emotion, both on entering the well-remembered house and ever since. In his ignorance of her condition, it seemed to him so unnatural a thing that she should actually be almost within his sight and hearing for so many hours, and yet hold aloof. How he had sat and listened at first for the footstep which he had learned to know and love as it flitted over his old castle halls and corridors, and which he had counted upon hearing with such infallible certainty, that the disappointment had brought with it as heavy a foreboding as if the sun had forgotten to rise at its appointed time. Gone from thence she could not be, since Janet remained, for he knew that his mother was still in France; and, oblivious of all perplexities but that, his every faculty had been called in aid to ascertain by some casual sound or indication how far he was from her. Even when Allan Johnstone had fancied him asleep, and taken advantage thereof to pay his kinswoman the visit we have related, the earl had in reality only feigned slumber to rid himself of the necessity for sharing in any conversation, and to be able to concentrate himself into that longing for Alice's presence which was continually doomed to be ungratified.

The weight on his mind, motionless and cold as the stone of a funeral vault, was there when Janet appeared, and the thrill of expectation which sent up the sluggish tide from his bounding heart in torrents to his cheek was extinguished immediately. A confused succession of questions faltered on his tongue; but were checked, partly by a natural and proper dis-

like to exposing his most intimate feelings to the remarks of inferiors, partly by sheer moral cowardice (for so he stigmatised it to himself), which utterly robbed him of all power to put the inquiry in which so much was involved.

Oh, Heaven! what *could* that curtain of blank silence conceal from him? Where was Alice—his sister, since she would accept no tenderer name—while he, wounded and suffering, was yearning in solitary sadness for the quickening charm of her dear voice, the healing radiance of her dear eyes? Where could she be who, even while refusing a wife's love, had so fervently promised him all else but that, and yet so heartlessly left him now to a stranger's care and a stranger's comforting.

He tried continually during the time spent by Janet in the rather tedious and elaborate operation of dressing the wound to catch her eye as she moved about him, and by conveying into his own glance the devouring anxiety which agitated him elicit from her a sympathetic look of comprehension and reply.

In these attempts he completely failed, as he supposed from a want of intelligence and interest on her part. He was however mistaken—Janet was quite alive to his wishes, but, believing that Allan's forming a third would debar him from resorting to more explicit communication, she indulged the almost malicious satisfaction she experienced in keeping him on the rack of his very evident suffering, as a fit retribution for his conduct towards Alice, as well as his present unauthorized and (according to her) illegitimate in-

terest in the person whom he had chosen to forsake, in order to gratify ambition or policy by his union with a lady of rank equal to his own.

How far imagination will lead us in judging of our fellow-creatures! The very sandy foundation upon which all these conclusions rested had so long been overlooked by the hasty architect thereof, that its instability was quite forgotten now, and conjecture had so gradually been allowed to merge into conviction, that the generous youth, whose lightest thoughts had never strayed from his first and only love, who had given her the greatest proof of sincerity which man can offer to woman by braving in his proud affection the ridicule and condemnation of the world in which he lived, was only in Janet's eyes a capricious, selfish man of fashion, who, after being carried away by passion into making an offer of marriage to a girl whose love he despaired of winning in any less honourable manner, had found himself in a false position, extricated himself from it by forming an alliance more congenial to his pride or cupidity, then coolly and unconcernedly had come in person to inform his old love that upon *that* footing they could be no more. Of what else he might have added to such a discovery, Janet had not arrived at any decided opinion, but her suspicions, which had laboured so assiduously in this rich field of possibilities, were not likely to have slackened in this particular direction, and their general bent was towards what Alice's humiliation and vague self-reproach rendered after all not so preposterously incredible, namely, that he had hinted that love and

marriage are two. The earl's behaviour confirmed this new complication of an already difficult situation.

To cut him off from any intercourse with Alice—if possible to deprive him of any acquaintance with her fortunes—seemed to Janet a means of punishing him through his own offence—and, poor revenge as it was, she made the most of it. She exulted every time his sad eyes rested speakingly on hers, as close as well-acted stolidity and obtuseness could make them; she triumphed at each variation of colour as entreating desire and bewildered disappointment attended each mute appeal; and thus, impenetrable to his most unequivocal pantomime, she completed her task—replied to his warm thanks by a repetition of her former haughtily respectful curtesy, and would have left the room. But to her astonishment the earl had placed himself between her and the intended exit, courteously but decidedly intercepting her retreat.

Janet drew back, and her countenance changed—but only to resume instantly its character of dogged e serve.

“ Mistress Rutherford, I am reluctant to show myself by any breach of civility undeserving of the hospitality to which I am obliged for shelter in my present unfortunate position—but, as I fear my previous efforts at expressing myself intelligibly to you have been unnoticed or misinterpreted, I must translate them into plain speech, and call for a reply as plain. Where is my foster-sister? and, if she be with you, how has she the heart to deny me the happiness of her sympathy and affection? She, whom I so loved! so *love!* ”

His deliberate steadiness all broke down at once in this vehement exclamation—it was so intense, so real and grief-stricken, that it appeared to star like the fall of a hammer the thick crust of ice which congealed the usual warm flow of Janet's eloquence, although that which followed it was not of a description to afford him much encouragement.

“Dy’e love her yet, my lord? your love, fause or true, is a shame to ye, and comes ower late to mend the ill yer cold perfidy has dune! So ye thocht that Janet Rutherford kenned naething o’ yer feignin’ and fleechin’ whereby ye won her bairn’s heart, or yer weddin’ o’ anither whenever ye trowed that ye held her sae fast that ye might do yer ain will, and get to yersel’ gear and pleasure, lady and limmer in ae stane’s fling!—marrying a wife while yer love-vows were yet hot on yer lips, and then having the frontless shame to insult and cast *her* off by yer ain word o’ mouth, wi’ nac mair ruth than the flesher has for the bit silly lamb beneath his knife!”

“Gracious Heaven!” exclaimed Lord Glencarrig in a low voice, “are you in your mind? Of what crime or cruelty is this that you accuse me?”

“Ask it o’ yersel’, my lord, your conscience canna be sac hardened yet that ye would daur to ——”

“To *lie* you would say,” interposed Lord Glencarrig in a deep, husky tone, “well! you are a woman——”

He could add no more then, but presently, stifling his anger, he said,

“Alice is —— still here?”

“ She is—Gude kens whether I will be able to say the same the morn! Weel may ye grow pale! mony a fond woman’s heart has been broke by man before, but never ane mair cruelly nor mair surely—weel ye may tremble! shall such a deed not be requited, though the world condemn not the doers thereof? ”

The young man had in truth both trembled and turned pale, and, without paying any further attention to prevent Janet’s departure, had thrown himself into a chair, letting his arms fall by his sides, and regarding her with open eyes and convulsive lips, a picture of incredulous despair.

“ I leave ye to your ain reflections, my lord, and to a worse thing I couldna leave ye. Rank and riches are nae sleeping draughts to an evil memory, I trow, nor yet spells to bind the tongue o’ ane wha daurs to ca’ sic matters by the names God will gie them when he rewards them! ”

“ I am the most unhappy wretch that ever breathed! ” exclaimed the earl springing up; “ some curse was surely laid upon me at my birth, that I misjudge and am misjudged by all I most venerate! How or when have I been false to my plighted promise, rejected as I was by her? how and when did I cast her off, whom I love as a woman, whom I revere as an angel? how did I ever give her one hour’s sorrow save by avowing and pressing my unwelcome love? I have not done all this, I swear it, although my brain is so utterly crushed by misfortune that I hardly dare to affirm that I may not be the villain you make me! ”

"Did ye not vow to love Alice Scott for ever and aye? did ye not swear to wed nae ither woman; to wait for her in patience, even if she should tarry years?"

"I did, I did! but she never loved me."

"Didna ye break that aith ere ye saw the Scottish hills again?"

"No, by my hopes of Heaven, no!"

"Arenae ye wedded, my Lord Glencarrig? I charge ye by those great words, and for such honour as ye may yet ca' yours, to speak me true."

"No, again—a hundred thousand times!"

He said it loudly, rapidly, answering this extraordinary interrogatory as unhesitatingly as if the questioner had possessed an indisputable authority to make it.

"And now, in pity tell me that I am mistaken—that Alice lives—that my love, my cares, my never-ending supplications may still keep her here below to bless me—that I may atone for having too easily distrusted her love for me, for not having seen it through her fears, her modesty, her noble pride——For me, me! oh ecstasy! Alice love *me*! oh, to hear her say it once, and to die!"

Was he selfish that at that instant of overpowering feelings the unutterable joy of that hope buoyed him above all fear, and his perfect love cast it out? What shall we say? Or was it that his imagination could not yet compass the magnitude of such calamity as her death?

"There's ane o' us gane daft—Gude kens whilk o'

the twa it is!" said old Janet solemnly. Then, with the look of one who has just struck upon a valuable test and hastens to employ it, she said,

"My lord, where were ye at midnight o' the sixteenth of March, this dolefu' year?"

The earl pressed his hand to his brow, and sought fruitlessly.

"The sixteenth of March? I was not here—I did not see her," he said unconnectedly.

"Yoursel' or your wraith spake wi' Alice Scott, in this chaumer, between eleven and twal' o' the clock," reiterated Janet firmly, with such positive conviction of the exactness of her assertion as would have won the belief of any bystander.

"The fiend in my form, rather," muttered the earl; "I cannot remember where I was; my senses are taking leave of me, I think."

"By your good leave, my lord, I can assist you," said Allan, who had not opened his lips, but had had the good taste to remain a discreet spectator of a scene of which he understood nearly as much as the principal actors.

"Answer her, then, if you have any ideas left—I have not," replied the young nobleman.

"At what hour say you, cousin Rutherford, was this interview to which you allude supposed to have taken place?"

"At midnight, as I telled ye; a mirk time for mirk doings," said Janet, all whose impressions were settling down into their former stability after the first shock which had somewhat dislodged them.

"Then, my good Janet, if his lordship appeared to you or any other wise woman after eight o' the clock on the sixteenth of March, it must have been in the spirit and not in the flesh, for his bodily presence was some good twenty miles hence on the Stirling road in the company of my former captain Mr. Ogilvie. I'll take my oath of that upon anything that pleases you best, and so would he."

"Thanks, thanks, Johnstone—but to need a servant's testimony to exonerate myself from an accusation of a meanness so cowardly, an insolence so unmanly!" said Lord Glencarrig in bitter mortification. "I will not be forbidden to see her any longer, if such were your only reason for excluding me. The obscurity which envelopes the rest of this mysterious difficulty may wait a better occasion to be cleared away. It will prove, I imagine, like what has been explained—little more than an old carline's dotage."

"Stop, ye hotheaded callant!" cried Janet with more energy than decorum. "Weel said ye that yer senses was takin' leave o' ye! D'ye wish to see her drap dead on the ground? Shew yersel' to her unawares, and that's the neist news ye'll get o' Alice Scott!"

As the earl irresolutely relinquished his hold of the door it was violently thrust open by the whole force of some one without, and Lizzy Morison threw herself into Janet's arms, sobbing hysterically—almost screaming.

"Alice, Alice!—oh dearie me! oh dearie me! come quick!" she gasped out, hiding her head in the wo-

man's apron. "Oh me! she looks like my wee brither Alick! She just stude up on her twa feet and sougheed out, 'Mither, father, Norman's gane frae hence, but he's no wi' you,' and then gaed down on her knees—Oh, come quick!"

"How will I come if ye grip me that gate? Unloose me, ye donnert fule!" cried Janet; and, shaking off the frightened child, urged her own strong but stiffened limbs towards the stairs; but a younger, fleeter foot, winged by all the speed of terror, had outstripped hers, and was on the highest landing ere she could reach the second.

On the flat before Alice's door. It was wide open. He had been but once before in that shrine of his sweetest and holiest earthly thoughts, and then the being whose dwelling made that poor chamber sacred ground to him had not been present to brighten it. He found her now—but how?

He stopped upon the threshold spellbound, as if the streaks of sunlight which crossed it had been the iron bars of the grating they painted on the floor. The whole richness of that fading glow was gathered upon a wealth of glossy hair which strayed over the cushions of the massive armchair, upon two small white hands folded beneath a cheek as white upon a bending neck, upon a mourning dress and a thin, nerveless form, half kneeling, half lying, before the seat from which it had risen—in the posture of a tired child surprised by slumber in the midst of its evening prayer at a parent's knees; and in truth at a Father's feet had sleep stolen to gentle Alice—that sleep which knows no waking,

which He giveth to His beloved when, wearied alike with the labours and the joys which He provides, they await in faith the rest which remaineth for them. But the dull horror that petrified him only holds him captive for a moment; it breaks at his first effort, and he is in the room—he is kneeling over her, supporting her against one knee, pillowing her head upon his wounded shoulder, utterly reckless of the suffering he is causing himself, insensible to the weakness which during the whole day had made the most trifling movement a toil.

“ Oh, Alice! oh, my best beloved! life of my life! star of my dark sky! speak to me, smile on me! Alice, I am not false, not fickle, not cruel—faithful to the end—faithful even to death; I am come back, my soul's idol, to make thee mine or perish with thee!”

But Alice could not speak nor smile at him; and, as he held fast his recovered treasure, he would have called aloud for assistance, but either the dead, strange stillness terrified him, or the air refused to bear the sound, for his voice seemed quenched upon his powerless tongue, and to lose itself in the thickness of a cloud—he scarcely heard it himself.

As he strove to repeat his call, Janet hurried in, and, bursting into tears, offered to take Alice from his arms.

“ Oh, my lord, lay her down, lay her down!—my puir lammie, my darlin'! May I be forgi'en that ever I left ye for ony man that ever walked! Gie her to me, Lord Glencarrig! ye hae nae right to ca' her yours!”

Still he heeded nothing, and only held her the closer, striving to infuse into the lifeless frame some spark of the strong vitality which rushed fast and full through his.

"Bring water, essences! fly for a physician—the best—no, the nearest! Good God! are you both insane to stand like statues thus! she may expire while you loiter Allan! you are youngest, strongest, I will make you rich for life—I can——"

"My lord," interrupted the soldier, "all the leeches in Edinburgh might spend their learning here; there's nothing but a miracle will restore her, she is long past aught else."

"Folly! she breathes—I felt it—her eyelashes quiver, her colour comes and goes—Alice, you must know *me*!"

"She'll mind ye nae mair, she'll answer ye nae mair; I ken that look ower truly, I havena seen it five times on the faces I lo'ed dearest, to misread it the day! Ou, my dear young gentleman!"—and Janet wrung her hands—"dinna look sae, dinna cry on her sae, for ye look and ye cry on the deid!"

He turned upon her with a glance so mad, so threatening, that the poor old woman recoiled, weeping and frightened.

"Woman, it is false!" he said, his voice sinking away to a fierce, hoarse whisper, "this is but a swoon; I saw her so when last I left her—she will soon recover. Make way, and give her air!"

Shocked and pity-struck, they dared not interfere, not even utter a word, as he feebly struggled to rise,

lifting the beautiful clay in his obstinate embrace, pressing his dry, passionate lips upon the motionless eyelids, bending his ear to catch the faintest flutter of the unquiet heart now at rest for ever ; and thus, in the golden summer twilight, he stood once more with Alice, his prayer fulfilled—hand in hand, heart to heart—with the illimitable abyss of eternity between them !

“ Alice ! ” murmured the imploring voice again, and oh ! the intensity of untold, unutterable dread in the preternatural calmness of those tones ! “ Alice, sister, wife, adored ! only tell me that I am loved, remembered—I ask no more. Do not fear me Alice, Alice ! wake, for Christ’s dear sake ! ”

No waking there ! all mute as the very tomb. What purple hues of falling night could spread that livid tinge over the face which drooped so helplessly low upon his heaving breast ?—what mortal trance could that be which imparted such awful rigidity to those fragile tender limbs ?—what spasm of sickening despair was that which quelled with one touch of its icy finger the wilful wrestling of hope against all hope, as that nameless fearful chill, to which the coldest *living* contact is warmth and comfort, froze the marrow of his bones and drank the fever from his cheek ? What need to ask ? He saw the truth, and his soul withered within him.

He wildly raised the face which had been laid on the marble brow of his Alice, and looked around—above him—with a distracted inarticulate cry, as if some supernatural power might yet descend to succour him.

“Dead! oh, my God! *dead!*” he groaned. “Merciful Father! is my heart of iron that it cannot break?”

The room seemed to whirl and darken, the solid floor to melt from beneath him—he staggered like a drunken man—and while Janet, drowned in tears, gently disengaged her darling’s corpse from the arms which could no longer sustain even that light burden, the unfortunate young earl tottered towards Allan, and, grasping his sturdy shoulder, leaned upon it, scarcely alive himself. When, after the lapse of a few minutes, Janet, still sobbing drearily, re-entered to bid them leave her to perform the last sad duties, she found Lord Glencarrig seated on a low settle, resting back against the wall, his eyes shut, his countenance ashy pale, trying, with his handkerchief pressed to his mouth, to stop the blood that was flowing from an old wound in the chest, which had opened afresh under the excitement and exertion of the past hour.

Allan, not being of the slightest use, said never a word, according to his taciturn wont on embarrassing occasions, but he appeared very honestly alarmed and concerned, and every now and then drew his broad hand privily over his face, to brush away from his thick moustache and weather-beaten cheeks such evidences of emotion as had not visited them time out of mind. In a quarter of an hour or so, perceiving some improvement in the earl’s condition, he signified to his cousin that they would depart, and, slipping his arm through Lord Glencarrig’s, led him from the room, docile as an infant in its nurse’s hand, and ap-

parently as passive, if not as senseless, as a somnambulist.

* * * * *

Everything was profoundly quiet in Janet's room when the earl, rousing himself from what was rather lethargy than sleep, found the night come, and himself extended upon the narrow alcove bed. A strong dose of brandy, administered by his goodnatured but rough companion, to whose conception it was the true panacea for every curable ailment, had succeeded in producing a temporary stupor; but its first narcotic effects had subsided, and the exciting fumes of the unwholesome cordial were stimulating into morbid activity a brain already irritated by illness and grief. He awoke gradually, without any remembrance of the events of the last twelve hours, but under such a sensation as might befit one buried alive—a dreadful perception of being enveloped beyond resistance in an inextricable web of fate. The darkness seemed to force itself like something tangible and hard into his throbbing eye-balls, wide stretched to discern over his head as he lay the clear expanse of deep blue sky between the tops of the majestic pines, whose broad and leafy branches had many a time been his sole canopy in the glorious Highland woods. Suffocating in the close heat of a sultry August night, he panted for one draught of their fresh, fragrant atmosphere, and sat up on his unaccustomed bed, endeavouring to discover by some faint reflections from the uncurtained lattice whether he had been transported back to the vaulted chamber at Blair Athol, where last he had awakened with that awful oppres-

sion on his soul, or whether the walls which surrounded him were the rude logs of some poor shieling, where, in spite of hunger, and weariness, and danger, he had often slept soundly night after night by the side of Dundee. Slowly he came down the stream of time which had borne him along since then, and, pausing at the last bend in life's dark river, the hydra Care, crouching in wait for him, encircled him with her serpent coils and fixed her fangs in his breast.

The aching, gnawing void round his heart was no new suffering to him, it had been his daily companion for *months*, his redoubled torment for *weeks* past; but the envenomed agony of this new and perfect misery pierced to the innermost recesses of his being. He fell back, stifling as well as he could the wild lament, "Alice! Alice!" which rose on his lips—then, seized by a half delirious energy, started to his feet, and slipped noiselessly across the room.

Softly he trod the stone pavement, unnoticed by Allan, who was fast asleep on the floor; softly he lifted the latch of the door, and groped with hands and feet until he found the stairs. Stealing on in the pitchy gloom, afraid, like a detected malefactor, of the echo of his own footsteps as he stumbled over the worn edges of the steep staircase, compelled every minute to pause and cling to the balustrade or the wall lest his dizzy head and leaden limbs should play him false, he nevertheless accomplished his intention at last—and threw himself down beside the door which separated him from Alice, as if the hard boards had been a bed of roses.

It was just ajar, and through the tiny opening came a thread of light broken by the passing to and fro of shadows within. The murmur of two voices, distinctly separable, issued at intervals from the little bed-chamber; and, as he watched without, a strange hallucination took possession of him—that Alice was not dead, and that in the second and sweeter female accents he heard her voice. This persuasion became so irresistible, and under its influence the heated fancy assumed such sway, that the massive thickness of the stone wall against which he tried to cool his beating brow and swollen eyelids seemed to grow transparent as glass to his vision, and allow him to behold within Alice, alive, moving; speaking with the accents which resembled hers; smiling, but with the ghastly shadow on her face which he had seen when that chill first smote him which he could not shake off. And when he strove to drive the phantom from his brain, and see nothing but the thick band of inky darkness which seemed bound over his temples, there, immovable, real as life, rigid as death, rose the black-robed figure, the golden locks, the bending neck, the folded hands, and—oh, God!—the face they hid!

The thread of light, growing wider, spread itself over the corridor, but the room door, opening outwards, concealed the earl from observation. A thin, poorly-dressed figure went timidly down into the obscurity of the staircase; Janet, remaining at the top, stooped over as she disappeared to cast the rays of the lamp further on her way. A sad “Good night” was exchanged, and Janet, turning to re-enter, saw that some one had preceded her.

Lord Glencarrig had only ventured to cross the threshold, and to her amazed, reproachful glance, replied beseechingly,

"Let me see her; she cannot be dead! Let me only see her! I shall go mad if you prevent me!"

The inexplicable submissiveness which he had shown all along towards Alice's old guardian was in his demeanour now—the proud noble behaved like a broken-spirited child, shrinkingly imploring from an offended superior a grace it cannot believe will be granted.

"Puir laddie!" murmured Janet. "Say, can ye pit yer hand on yer conscience and swear that ye are in a' things utterly sinless o' her death? Say, can ye do this in truth? If ye canna, Airle o' Glencarrig, seek na to approach her again, lest the corpse should arise to ca' ye perjured."

"I can."

"Come then."

And taking him by the arm she led him forwards and placed him beside Alice.

She lay upon her couch, robed in her winding-sheet as it had been a bridal garment, which sank over the lovely form, so frail, so pure, that it seemed rather the embodied image of her sweet memory than any common earth of our mortal habitation. The hands, transparently thin and of pearly whiteness, were crossed meekly on her bosom over the little Bible which had been her rod and her staff; the delicate cheek was just turned aside, as if it had only sought the pillow for its evening rest; the brown hair gathered up and confined, not by funereal black, but, touching and beautiful

fancy! a snood of spotless white—for the days of her mourning were ended. But the divine repose, the exquisite serenity, of that new birth into immortality had no spell to calm the agonized heart of the young lover—the great wave of his anguish, which had been rising ever higher and higher, swept up and burst upon his soul with a fury that defied restraint. Flinging himself on his knees by the bedside, he stretched forth his wrung hands to the hands of the dead, shaking the couch with the passion of his sobs, and cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry that it was better for him to die than to live—the affectionate nurse, unable to bear the sight, retired into the other apartment, leaving him without a witness of his affliction, to relieve her own as she dared not do in that solemn presence of the departed, until the heavy slumber of old age stole insensibly over her as she sat; and thus the darkling hours glided swiftly by.

Not with him, alas! for him came no ministering angel to bring even the most transient oblivion of his incalculable losses. As the night saw him, so the dawn found him—the beautiful dawn, which rises alike on the just and the unjust—alike on the happy, to whom it brings fresh stores of health and pleasure, as to the mourner, from whom the joy of the eyes and the desire of the soul have fled. Three weeks had scarcely elapsed since he had bedewed the unhonoured grave of his heroic kinsman with such tears as men rarely shed—still less for one another; and long ere time had been able to soothe that smart he had been guided, as it were, by the very finger of Providence to

the spot of earth where he most passionately longed to be—too late to receive one parting kiss, too late to glean one parting word, too late for aught but to kneel, bent, haggard, stony-eyed—gazing as men gaze on the ruins of all the world contained for them—clinging with close-knit, trembling fingers to one slight fold of the snowy shroud, as men *do* cling to all that God wills to take from their adoring grasp.

Poor stranded wanderer on the shores of life! not long shalt thou stretch forth thy empty arms across the sea of eternity towards the dim horizon where the bark freighted with thy perishing treasures has vanished from thy tearful sight, that whither that treasure has gone thy heart may follow too! Patience yet a little while! thy night is far spent, thy day at hand; walk on by faith and not by sense through that vain shadow wherein man disquieteth himself, and the morn that knows *no* night shall rise to cheer thee over the golden hills of the Land that is very far away.

* * * * *

His own mother's hand could not have been more gentle, his own mother's voice more soothing, than Janet's when at an early hour she came to summon him away. It was impossible to refuse obedience to such an intimation; yet at the first request he made no answer, nor even looked up—at the second he complied silently; but Janet, who still kept her hand firmly on his shoulder, distinctly felt the strong contraction and shuddering of every limb as he mechanically dragged himself up, with a slow wrench which might have been the severing of soul and body.

When she had conducted him into the sitting-room, and extinguished the smoky, waning lamp which had seen his vigil, she brought from the cabinet the packet prepared by Alice the previous day in some mysterious prevision of her approaching demise. He carried it to the window, and read its address,

“For the Earl of Glencarrig; to be given to him after my death.”

The letter for Lady Flora presented itself first upon opening it, then that directed to himself. He turned more completely from Janet's scrutinizing though respectful observation, and bent his head over this relic of his dead love with that infinite, ineffable yearning of the whole being towards the lost which exceeds all power of thought to express, much more of language to describe. The morn was yet so grey, and, contending with mist and rain, shone so dimly into the narrow street, that the light was inadequate to allow him to read rapidly the irregular, feeble handwriting which covered two pages of the sheet. Line after line, almost word by word, he was compelled to decipher its meaning, and as he did so the tiny drop of honey which had lurked at the bottom of his cup of bitterness became absorbed in the overflowing of that cup; the old certainty that Alice had only loved him as a friend, which had been for a time shaken to the foundation by Janet's asseverations, was after all the only truth; and in the apathy of his misfortune he accepted that knowledge again, and took it home to him, and never for one second tried to delude himself, or regain the brittle spar which might have helped to

float him above the drifting tide that must henceforth carry him on, a dried and leafless branch, to the goal of his existence. He had bowed himself to the decree of Heaven, and cared not to struggle longer; what could he desire or labour for? Let all go! All? what more had he to surrender, what more to feel?

One thing at least to learn, the name of the man who had possessed and rejected, miserable fool! a blessing for which *he* had wearied Heaven with prayers. He untied the ribbon which fastened the little book, drew out a ring, and the paper to which Alice alluded in her touching farewell.

It dropped from his fingers, paralysed by the sight of the familiar hand and cipher, which stood out like the fiery sentence on the wall. Janet offered to restore it, but he held her off at arm's length.

"You deceived me, shamefully deceived me! How dared you say she loved me, woman—that *my* desertion broke her heart?——"

"Me!" exclaimed the astonished Janet, "me! ochonari! who has been deceived here? not yersel', of a surety!"

"Both, all of us! It was not I——"

"It was! I would swear it——."

"Swear not to anything so false! Here—here is proof in her own writing, in . . . in *his*, whom she loved. Oh misery!"

After a long pause of sad silence, he began afresh to read and compare the letter with his own secret memories, until all doubt was gone, and grief and pity could find no spot untouched to plant one further sting.

"Can I marvel that she so loved him? Can I, of all living men, remembering what he was, marvel that she loved me not? Oh, friend, brother! noblest and best! to thy memory alone could hers be united yet grow the dearer for such bond! But oh, what she must have suffered——!"

He had moved vaguely, aimlessly, towards the chamber of death, whither Janet dared not follow him again, his step and gestures those of a blind man, so uncertain and purposeless did they seem.

"Once more," he murmured, "only once more. I must give her my promise of silence, or she will not sleep in peace. I am coming, Alice! Let me go—do not detain me," he added angrily, repulsing Janet, who would have protested against his wish.

She read in his dark, restless eye a strength of woe which would bear no curb, and prudently forbore to arouse its tempests afresh. He came forth in a very few minutes, looking rather like the corpse he had just quitted than the living man he was; his right hand concealing something in the breast of his dress, while the other dried upon his lips the same crimson stains which the evening before had reddened their livid pallor.

Into those minutes the agony of years had been compressed, and for him the bitterness of death was past.

CHAPTER XLIX.

CONCLUSION.

Oh bury me under the bracken bush,
And by the blooming brier,
And never let living mortal ken
That a kindly Scot lies here.

OLD BALLAD.

Flow down, cold rivulet, to the sea,
Thy tribute wave deliver,
No more by thee my steps shall be,
For ever and for ever.

TENNYSON.

WE trust that the reader has felt sufficiently interested in the fortunes of the Earl of Glencarrig to peruse with patience the few pages in which we would sketch the close of a career so fraught with sorrows and events. It shall be concisely done, leaving the reader to fill up the blanks by the help of that imagination upon which we have already, in the progress of this simple story, made such repeated and onerous demands.

After the death of Alice, the young lord continued in Edinburgh only as long as was required to pay the last duties to the beloved remains, and set on foot the best arrangement his situation permitted him to make for ensuring some provision to her worthy and faithful attendant. This completed, he obtained permission, through the credit he possessed with several ex-Jacobite

members of government, to leave Scotland unmolested. It was the utmost that could be granted to so uncompromising a rebel; his estates had been forfeited to the last acre; and the young man quitted his native shores attainted in name, bruised in spirit, sick in body, a poverty-stricken exile, to rejoin on a strange soil the relatives who were all that he had now to love.

He had had no courage to announce his coming by letter, and, on arriving in Paris, found that the countess had set out for the coast that very morning to embark at Havre for Scotland. The information which he brought in person entirely obviated any necessity for this journey, and the earl's first care was to dispatch a mounted courier to bear this message to her, and communicate his arrival. Lord Gilbert Hay was at St. Germain's, and the earl found his sister in the countess's apartments. She was sitting with her little girl, a lovely infant, on her knees; somewhat thinner, paler, and graver, than of yore, but not so as to impair either her beauty or her bright cheerfulness, which latter, chastened by the responsibilities of her double duties, was an invaluable support to herself, and a daily source of pleasure to all around. All the girl's faults were softening and developing into womanly virtues—levity sobering into animation, wilfulness into resolution, the desire for applause into the effort to do right—impulse giving place to principle. The Flora of nineteen, wife and mother, had already, without losing one grace of her natural gifts, divested herself of many defects which could have been imputed

to the coquettish beauty of a year before, who had lived only for excitement, and knew no law except her own amiable and generous but unstable will.

How charming she looked as she sprang to his arms and threw herself upon his neck! How tenderly grieved at his sunken cheeks and worn, haggard looks! How glowing and bright with pretty pride as she lifted up the tiny darling to her brother's kisses, and bade him admire little Alice, talking all the while so hopefully of her mother's return with their foster-sister, whose name she had bestowed on it; but, seeing that he half shrank from her innocent transports—that he only spoke by monosyllables—that, while showing himself fond and brotherly as ever, some concealment was weighing upon him, Lady Flora drew from him that the countess's journey would not be accomplished, and that perhaps the next day she would be again in Paris.

In sudden alarm, Flora asked, what up till then she had taken for granted—whether Alice were well? She knew she had been sick, poor darling, but had he seen her in Edinburgh—was she quite well?

“Ay, my own Flora; better and happier far than those she has left behind to mourn her.”

Lady Flora unclasped her hands from round her brother's neck, her eyes searching his countenance in blank awe. Every premature line, every trace of his bright youth effaced from the features where it should have shone so joyously, was a more eloquent confirmation than tongue could have uttered. She walked away to her infant's cradle, knelt silently down, and,

crossing her arms over the happy little sleeper, cried as if her tender heart were broken.

The earl followed her, and, after granting a short interval to the indulgence of natural sorrow, passed his arm round her, and raised her head so as to look into her swimming eyes. In the waywardness of her distress she would have hidden them again, but the earl held her with gentle force.

"Sister, I am selfish; you know what I have lost, and you must comfort me."

The string so skilfully touched in this innocent dissimulation vibrated at once. She suffered him to place her on the prie-dieu chair and lay her little daughter in her arms, while he stood beside her, keeping his right arm round her shoulders, her beautiful head resting against him.

"David," she said softly.

"Well, dearest?"

"Did she suffer much?"

"No, she passed away as a seraph soars from earth to heaven."

"You saw her; did she know you?"

"No—one moment too late—all was over—"

Flora's eyes were cast down on her babe as it lay in her lap, so she did not see how his left hand was clenched until the nails grew bloodless, or the depth of despair in his dark, passionate eyes as he turned them up towards the sky. He had spoken of being comforted, and he would not for much have acknowledged that his only joy at that moment would have been to follow where Alice had gone before; he

kept that cruel certainty to himself; and Flora, true woman in spite of her failings, put by her own grief to think of and minister to his.

“How long is this ago?”

“On the evening of the 17th of August.”

“The night my darling was born,” sobbed poor Flora, laying her wet cheek upon the little waxen face, her rich, jetty curls hanging round both like a curtain. They hid a sharp struggle for composure, which terminated, as Flora’s self-denying efforts were beginning to do, in victory. Her brother had done her no more than justice by supposing that the hope of soothing his incurable regret would be the strongest inducement to courage and submission under her own. She was soon able to receive and read without too great agitation Alice’s letter to her; of his own the earl made no mention, but both Flora and her mother felt assured that he was in possession of some key to the secret which had clouded the latter part of their friend’s life; and, finding that he maintained a close silence on this particular, the countess thought it best to set the matter at rest one way or the other. His respectful but decided answer to her question both admitted the knowledge and explained a reserve which must otherwise have appeared unkind.

“Ask me no more, dear ones, both,” he said to her and Flora, as they sat together round the fire, in the dusk of an autumn evening. “I am sworn to silence; bound by her dying command and by my own promise uttered near her corpse. It is enough to say that he was worthy even of *her* love; but I know also that, as

many a saint has lived less saintly, many a martyr has endured a less martyrdom. Hush, sister, sister, do not weep so !”

Lady Glencarrig, who held her son's hand, was very calm outwardly, but the fingers entwined in his spoke volumes in their spasmodic pressure. He left the room almost immediately, and did not rejoin the family circle until the next day; and the affectionate women, drawing closer together, conjured up in the quiet twilight a thousand sad forebodings of the time when he would again leave them to drown his miserable regrets in active military service, either of the exiled King, or of the monarch who had received and protected him.

But time presses, and we must not linger over the details of the ensuing months. The mere outline of facts will suffice for our present purpose.

The intelligent care and cheerful society of his relations, who devoted their whole art of feminine skill to repair the devastation of sickness and misfortune, restored the young nobleman to some degree of health and spirits, and, on the return of James from his luckless Irish campaign, he presented himself, by the countess's desire, at the English court, which still attempted to keep up in the half-inhabited palace of St. Germain's a tithe of the state it had gloried in at Whitehall. Nothing could well be more melancholy to behold than the scanty assemblage of loyal gentlemen who met there to prove, in the extremity of their poverty and ruin, how firm was still their integrity and honour, except, indeed, the sanguine anticipations which they persisted in drawing from indifferent or even unfavourable

occurrences; buoying up themselves and the King with chimerical schemes for a restoration which was becoming ever more positively and evidently impracticable. These few gallant, generous, and, above all, *desperate* exiles were a host in themselves, but there was none to head that host. Dundee was gone; and their courage, an invaluable weapon in the hands of genius, rusted inactive and unused as the sword of some potent knight of romance hangs idly in his deserted castle; no arm comes nigh mighty enough to draw the blade which the dead warrior wielded so lightly.

The appearance of the young Earl of Glencarrig created no small sensation in this circle, both from his rank and valour, his real services, and his relationship and intimacy with Lord Dundee. This sensation was, however, not quite one of that union and good fellowship which is said to arise between companions in affliction, for unfortunately jealousies and dissensions were almost as prevalent in this phantom of a court as they had been during its prosperous reality; such trifling distinctions as James still had it in his power to grant being as eagerly disputed as when a title implied some solid emolument in lands or privileges, and a place at court had any value beyond the right of assisting at the King's toilet, or standing behind his chair at dinner. Of such favours Lord Glencarrig had no need, but all the personal attention by which James could honour the young nobleman was pointedly bestowed on him—and that not altogether, as the latter soon began to suspect, from an undue estimate of his merits, or in recognition of former sacrifices.

The fact is that James VII., whom under the best aspect we cannot regard as other than an imprudent and obstinate bigot, had been seized since his dethronement with a recrudescence of that intemperate zeal for proselytism to which in some measure his fall may be ascribed, and had cast his eye upon the earl as a promising subject for the gratification of his unreasonable ardour for the conversion of heretics. His Majesty calculated, not unnaturally, upon Glencarrig's youth and probable pliability of temper, to give due effect to the arguments of a staff of Jesuit counsellors, backed by such inducements as he could offer from his meagre resources, or those of Louis XIV., who, while unblushingly neglectful of all practical morality himself, was apt to be unpleasantly solicitous about the doctrinal orthodoxy of such as came within reach of his theological jurisdiction. But, when he imagined that Lord Glencarrig would prove a facile convert, the royal missionary had decidedly counted without his host.

He was not much surprised at first by the young man's resistance to the ingenious attempts made upon his creed by the priests who had undertaken to convince him of the lamentable inferiority of Protestantism, but its continuance disconcerted him. All the arguments of the King's most talented and insinuating spiritual advisers were either suffered to pass with courteous but sarcastic assent, or met with a simple right-minded common sense, and a genuineness of conviction which showed how little hold the most seductive offers of temporal profit were likely to obtain upon his mind. James was both puzzled and irritated, all the more

that the earl's example proved contagious, and served to invigorate the wavering faith of some who, in the sheer listlessness of ruin, were half inclined to abandon that with all the rest, at the command of the prince for whom they had beggared themselves.

Amongst these was the earl's namesake and friend David Lindsay of Burnielaw, who, having escaped unhurt at Killiecrankie, had remained with the Highland army under Cannon, until its dissolution after the repulse sustained at Dunkeld—in which obstinate combat William Cleland, who had been chosen as colonel of the Cameronian regiment, was shot by the hand of his old acquaintance. He had afterwards shared the fearful reverses which met the Jacobite troops under General Buchan at Cromdale during the winter of 1689-90, and, after conducting himself in the most gallant manner during the murderous onslaught of Livingstone, had thrown himself, along with Captain Ogilvie and several other gentlemen, into the most inaccessible part of the Highlands of Inverness, and from thence contrived to reach France, where, having rescued a trifle from the wreck of their property, they managed to live for a time. Ogilvie and Burnielaw found themselves exposed to precisely the same temptations as Lord Glencarrig; they might have obtained by apostacy a chance of acquiring in the service of the French king station and wealth equal to that which they had forfeited; for Louis understood too well and prized too highly the valour of such noble refugees to have withheld anything which could induce them to conform to his solicitations. Ogilvie rejected at once

and with scorn all offers to purchase, all persuasions tending to undermine, his convictions. Lindsay, young and thoughtless, perhaps only half alive to the signification of what he had been accustomed to treat as a mere matter of form and fashion, seemed in a fair way to yield, when the Earl of Glencarrig, deeply concerned for his welfare, stepped in to the rescue, and by his friendly advice and support saved the generous, sound-hearted lad from an act which in after-life might have caused him both shame and regret.

But every visit which the earl paid to St. Germain's diminished his willingness to repeat it. The intolerance of the King, which had led him to tyrannize over his *heterodox* subjects in his native realm, waxed fiercer the narrower became the range of its action ; and those of his exiled nobles and servants who were neither Catholics, nor willing to become so, were excluded even from the paltry advantages of his favour. The Earl of Dunfermline in particular, a sincere and conscientious Protestant, was subjected to a neglect and insult doubly disgraceful towards a man who had such valid claims upon his sovereign's regard, and which, superadded to the sufferings of banishment and penury, finally broke the heart of Dundee's staunchest friend.

Pained and disgusted beyond expression at a bigotry by which loyalty and necessity were so unworthily called in to conquer principle, disappointed moreover in his exertions to extricate himself from a galling dependence on his mother and sister, the young lord determined to avail himself of the first opportunity of engaging as a volunteer in the wars which were then

raging or threatening on every frontier of France. He had been offered, upon the old condition, a captaincy in the household troops of Louis, a post which scions of the noblest French families vied with each other to attain; and, under the same stipulation, a match had been proposed which would have united him, a penniless exile, under the beautiful and richly-dowered heiress of a branch of the princely house of Rohan, who had herself distinguished the highborn stranger with uncommon tokens of sympathy. But he turned a deaf ear to promises—and woman's smiles fell cold as moonlight on snow upon a heart where love had burnt itself away, and scattered its pale ashes over a lowly distant grave beneath Scottish turf.

"I shall go no more to St. Germain's, mother," he said to the countess, when conversing with her one day after his return from an audience which had produced no better result than many another.

"Why, David?

"Because I feel myself utterly misplaced amongst such dissension and rashness, because I can do nothing but mourn over errors which I have no more power than you to remedy, and, worse than either, because my faith is tried by insidious, false friends urging me to forswear my last hope, almost to do as the devil tempted Job—to curse God and die—or little better."

His mother stood by him like his guardian angel, and her lips moved silently in holy thankfulness—her intercessions for him that he might come unscathed through this ordeal had been accepted.

"Your face looks joyous, dear mother; how is that? my speech is gloomy enough."

“Not to me, David! not to me, son of my love and of my prayers! when thou tellest me that thou hast viewed such temptations with the single eye. Did'st thou know how I have wrestled with God for thee thou would'st not wonder that my heart should be light now!”

“Mother!” He started up and looked with mild reproach in her face, “Mother! did you ever think that *your* son would sell his birthright for a morsel of bread?”

The lady's tears would not be stayed; in mingled grief and joy she embraced her noble son, and never in his promising boyhood, never in his prosperous and brilliant fortune, had her heart dilated with half the pride and love which swelled it now.

The earl adhered pertinaciously to the above resolution, not allowing it to be shaken by the representations and even reproaches of those who were unacquainted with the motives of his absence, or treated them as mere excuses for conduct which was very generally supposed to arise from pique.

The winter months passed thus, during which time Captain Ogilvie and the Laird of Burnielaw improved the acquaintance begun under more auspicious circumstances, and became intimate and favourite guests at the residence which Lady Glencarrig occupied with her daughter and son-in-law. The high and thoughtful character of Ogilvie was in every way congenial to that of the countess, while the amiable disposition and social qualities of young Lindsay won him a genuine welcome, and something of a mother's affection, from the kind lady. Lindsay's poetical fancy fastened with

true romantic enthusiasm upon the society of two beautiful and accomplished women, the elder scarcely less attractive than the younger in person, and perhaps more so in the softness and pensive grace of her manners. He had never known his mother—never had a sister—and, while observing with unimpeachable respect the proper distance between them, paid to the charms of both a meed of chivalrous admiration disinterested and ethereal enough to have done credit to any knight errant that ever was contented to kiss the hem of his lady's garment.

This little knot of friends, drawn together by such numerous bonds of sympathy and similarity of taste and feeling, found such pleasure in each other's society, and, keeping clear from the quarrels and errors which disturbed the great body of Scottish refugees, held the even tenour of their way so peaceably, that in that quiet home-life sorrow for the past and apprehension for the future were partially lulled to sleep, and the spring of 1691 was at hand before the event which Flora and her mother had foreseen was realized. The earl enlisted as a private gentleman in a newly-formed regiment consisting entirely of Scottish officers of good family; and his two friends, who had long and fruitlessly endeavoured to obtain superior employment at a cost less than that which they were determined never to pay, followed his example in order to accompany him.

This regiment, perhaps the finest that ever marched to the field, was, as we have said, composed exclusively of men of station, principally gentlemen who had

served in James's Scottish forces, and had gone into voluntary banishment, or had fled from the consequences of their share in Dundee's rising. They had been maintained by Louis for a short time on the full pay of their rank, without, however, holding any corresponding command in the French army; but this subsistence upon foreign alms, this eating the bread of charity, was intolerably irksome to high-spirited and high-born men, and by common consent they demanded to be embodied in a separate corps, officered by their own selection; willing to risk any hardships, or undertake any duty, rather than wither in the monotony of inaction. The regiment was therefore constituted, and placed under the orders of Marshal de Noailles, then engaged in besieging the principal fortresses of Catalonia. Thither it was directed to proceed at the shortest notice, to support that general's movements.

The pay granted to them by the French government was miserably small, their necessities great, for by far the greater number were completely destitute of private resources. Most of them had been bred in ease, many in affluence; and hardships at which they would have laughed in the healthy, bracing atmosphere of their own climate, became fatal when endured beneath an almost tropical sky, and amongst undrained and pestilential marshes such as they had to traverse. The mortality which arose amongst them may be easily imagined, and by the time they joined the army in Spain there was already a notable diminution in their scanty array.

Glencarrig and his friends, better provided than most of their unfortunate comrades, spared no sacrifice to alleviate the destitution they witnessed; but their moderate resources, although shared to the uttermost farthing, were soon exhausted, without producing much impression upon the wants of so large a number. On the arrival of the Scotch auxiliaries they were heartily welcomed by the French Marshal, and, at their own desire, were assigned the most dangerous posts and the most fatiguing service throughout the operations of the campaign; behaving on all occasions with such desperate gallantry as could only be shown by men too brave to challenge death by the coward act of suicide, yet thirsting to meet it in the discharge of duty. And too often, alas! was this desire gratified, as crowded trench and corpse-strewn plain could tell; not there alone, but on every frontier whither these undaunted exiles carried their resistless arms and reckless valour.

Our three friends were not backward in any enterprise where danger was to be defied; and rarely was a breach stormed, a charge executed, a forlorn hope chosen, without including in its daring few these young men, who, tacitly and by some unspoken agreement, had become inseparable. In camp or bivouac, as in more commodious quarters, it was only needful to learn the whereabouts of the one to be sure of finding the other; they ate and slept, fought, marched—in short, lived—together in a strange, solitary way that was remarked by all their comrades. Lord Glencarrig, although younger than Ogilvie by

nearly ten years, had nevertheless, by temperament and circumstances, more affinity with that brave and unfortunate soldier * than with the gay and mercurial Lindsay, whom no amount of trouble was able to depress beyond the moment of its occurrence, and their double influence was in all respects beneficial to the unformed character of the latter, by inspiring him with more sober views of life, and instilling into his mind principles at once more practical and more elevating than his early vague and rather visionary ideas. True and trusty friends were they—excellent specimens of that attachment between honourable and generous men which, where unselfish and firmly grounded, is as admirable and sometimes more enduring than the love of man and woman. A charm seemed to surround them, as if fate respected their mutual affection, and were loath to deprive either of the solace which he drew from the society of the other. Foremost in every daring adventure of the Spanish campaign, subject to every unwholesome influence, nay, seeking every occasion, not of winning renown—which two at least had ceased to prize, but of relieving their weaker brethren and maintaining to the utmost their honour as cavaliers and Scottish gentlemen—bullets refused to harm them, danger seemed to disperse before them, and sickness, which ravaged frightfully the ranks of warriors born and reared in a hardier clime, spared to sever the chain which bound these three noble hearts.

* Captain Ogilvie was killed a few years later during the passage of the Rhine.

But only for a time, else the reader would have been also spared the conclusion of a tale already sad enough. Towards the close of the summer of 1691, the French army, or rather a portion of it, lay before a small town about eighteen miles from Figueras, which had been captured and retaken, and, being of importance to the lines of communication with France, was in course of being besieged for the second time. On this service, as on all others involving difficulty and discomfort, the Scots had been ordered out, and to it they marched with a stern and gloomy gaiety, (if we may use such a term,) indicating too well in how many breasts the hope was rife that, when the ramparts were won, they might be lying in honour on the spot they had bought with their blood.

The town was valuable to both parties, and well defended; the siege languished, and during the delay necessary to bring up reinforcements from the main body, with additional artillery, the intense heat of the weather, combined with the mephitic exhalations of a large camp, and the scarcity of eatable, not to say wholesome food, bred amongst the besiegers the diseases which are the invariable results of such causes. From the very first appearance of an epidemic which swept off hundreds of veteran soldiers, Lord Glencarrig had expressed a decided presentiment that he would fall a victim to it, and he certainly took no pains to avoid the contagion while endeavouring to assuage the miseries of his unfortunate countrymen. It finally began to abate; the same Providence which had hitherto shielded him had also warded off the arrows

of pestilence, and his friends were beginning to smile at his assertions ; when one evening the earl came home at sunset from seeing a poor soldier, in whom with surprise he had recognised one of his own vassals, and who was at the point of death in the French quarter of the camp. Lindsay was absent, on guard at the trenches ; Ogilvie was seated reading, outside their little tent, which had been pitched on a low knoll, at a short distance apart from those of their comrades.

The earl stretched himself wearily on the harsh, rank grass, and, supporting his head on his already burning hand, looked far, far over the wide prospect to where, flooded by the last splendours of a southern eve, the gigantic Pyrenees flamed on the horizon like a crested barrier of ruddy gold and oriental purple, tipped with glittering silver—his eyes beaming, as if in the distant reflection, with a brilliancy which Ogilvie noted as ominously unnatural. He entreated his friend to retire within the tent, and not increase whatever mischief might have begun by carelessly exposing himself to the poisonous dews and chill night-air.

“ What matters ? ” said the earl dreamily. “ Let me look my last on those gorgeous mountains ; they remind me of the chain of hills which I used to watch at sunset from my ancient castle turrets ; fancy carries me back thither, and my aching heart rests there. Never, save in thought, shall I revisit them, but even *that* is sweet to me.”

“ Glencarrig, a brave man should never court death. Await it calmly, defy it manfully, if you will ; but, believe me, there is more true grandeur in the soul which

can endure life than in the meaner spirit which fears not to seek death. You *must* live, you are not your own."

"I am willing," replied the young earl with a smile of indescribable expression. "I am content to wear the worn-out garment until it drop from me. We shall see. Poor mother! poor Flora!—and poor Lindsay too!" he added smiling again; then rose and betook himself to his wretched straw pallet as placidly as ever he had lain down on the softest bed, when all the future was before him, and his dreams a rainbow phantasy of utopian glory and happiness.

The next day, with all Ogilvie's care, he was too ill to rise, and Lindsay, returning in overflowing spirits with accounts of a decisive success in a nocturnal attack upon the works of the town, was instantly and completely sobered by the intelligence which met him.

It was evident that while Lord Glencarrig continued cooped up within the confined space of a small tent, and constantly exposed to the deleterious effects of so unfavourable a situation, all expectation of amendment would be absurd. Ogilvie therefore obtained from the French commander of the division to which they belonged licence to remove the earl to a deserted cabin situated in a cooler and healthier spot about half a mile from the camp, and attend him there, in so far as that occupation involved no dereliction from his soldier's duties. This latter request for himself and Lindsay was readily acceded to, and acted upon with such expedition that by nightfall the earl had been transported to his new abode, and placed in such poor comfort as their ingenuity could discover or create for him.

Lindsay's distress was excessive, and in unselfish consideration for his feelings Ogilvie took upon himself an extra share of all such military employments as admitted of exchange—thus leaving to Burnielaw the almost exclusive charge of their friend. The earl understood perfectly the motive on which he acted, and valued him the more for its generosity: indeed his mind rarely wandered, or, if it did, never on such points. The slow incessant fever which preyed upon him was not violent enough to produce absolute delirium, but his friends could not hide from themselves that, whatever amelioration the cooler evening air or intervals of uneasy sleep might bring, waxed less and less as the fiery days came up, waxed less and less with each succeeding night.

He was as gentle and patient as a woman, asked for nothing which he knew they would have grieved at being unable to procure—never uttered a complaint; but it was a sore trial to the home-sick exiles to hear him talk eagerly, in his choking, languid tones, of breezy hills where he had roamed in childhood, of the clear, deep azure of their northern skies, far lovelier than the white, blazing firmament of the torrid south—of the solemn grandeur of dark pine-forests—of the delicious freshness which his own clear Carrigburn diffused around, as it wound its pellucid current towards the ocean. They, who so yearned for what the dying man desired, could well nigh have wept at the memory which each had of some such lost home—more beautiful than any other scene on earth to them—more longed for than any thing on this side the grave.

"I could die so easily if I were there," he said faintly one night, when, worn out with sickness and devoured by insatiable thirst, the picture of his home in all its luxuriance of temperate shade and humid verdure became a torturing reality before his mind's eye.

Lindsay, who was alone with him, offered him some water, the best one tiny thread of a brook creeping lazily between white, sun-dried stones could furnish; but the earl could not touch it, it was so hot and thick, and, thanking his friend, turned away his lips almost with loathing—only to ask for it again in a moment when the craving became intolerable.

"Glencarrig, if I could but be in your place!" said the generous youth, "I have no soul to mourn for me!"

"And you have never mourned so for any as to make death welcome and kind," replied the earl. "Lindsay, hearken hither. Nay, nearer—come nearer, dear lad—I never felt so weak."

Lindsay was obliged to kneel down by the low truckle-bed, so as to bring his ear on a level with his comrade's lips.

"Bear back my eternal, undying love to my mother, give her my last blessing, her son's fervent blessing, and tell her that he died in the hope that is hers, in the faith she taught, and which by God's grace he kept unto the end. That will comfort her as nothing else can."

"I will, trust me, I will," murmured Lindsay.

"I bequeath you to her as a son, you must fill my place in that. Walk by her counsels, they will never lead you astray. These kisses to her and my sweet Flora."

The young earl, whose arm had been drawn round Lindsay's neck, pressed him closer with all his little remaining strength: the lad could only hide his face on the dying man's breast, fighting with tears he was too proud to shed or too generous to show, and wish for morning and Ogilvie's return, as if they must assuredly bring help and cheerfulness in their train.

Daybreak came, and with it Ogilvie, spent and downhearted. He was accompanied by the surgeon of their brigade, who, overtaxed by multitudinous calls upon his attention, had not yet been able to spare an instant to visit the young Scottish nobleman, and had only been persuaded to do so now by the anxious entreaties of Ogilvie. The visit was a short one, for other claims on his time and skill were urgent; indeed in the utter scarcity of everything which might have contributed to a cure there was very little to be done beyond pronouncing on the probabilities of unassisted recovery. He took Ogilvie apart and said,

"There are other causes than mere disease at work here. Are you aware of them?"

"Yes!" said Ogilvie, shortly. Then, after a moment, he continued with exceeding sadness,

"The same causes which are grinding us all too surely down—banishment, poverty, broken hearts—But will he live?"

"Complete change of scene, removal into a climate more like that in which he was born, the greatest care and ease of mind, might have saved him ——"

"Can they not avail now?" asked Ogilvie, instantly forming a scheme for quitting the French service, and,

if needful, incurring all the obloquy such a step might entail, in order to convey his friend from this pernicious spot. "If there is one chance to ten, speak, and I will act. He is an only son, adored by his mother and sister, dearly loved by yonder poor boy" (he glanced back at Lindsay, who was busying himself about some slight arrangement with an adroitness and delicacy beautiful to see in the high-spirited and once careless youth), "and I—am his *friend*," concluded the brave soldier, simply.

"Monsieur," replied the Frenchman, "it is possible that he *might* have lived if everything had been in his favour, but, if you ask me frankly the chances now, I answer you; Monsieur le Comte may linger on a day or two, he may not pass the night. Recover he cannot; when the sap dries, the tree decays."

The gentleman said no more, and the surgeon departed. Ogilvie had spent the preceding eighteen hours on foot, but he felt no inclination to sleep. He took his usual station on one side of the earl's bed, and not a syllable was spoken. The transient coolness of morning prime soon changed to scorching heat, and that into a fervour so intense that every breath they drew was suffocation. The furnace-glow poured down through the thatched roof of the mud hovel until the atmosphere burned like a blast of the sirocco, and they had no more means of obtaining a mitigation of their friend's deathly oppression than if fresh water had been molten gold, and pure air the winds of Paradise. Money could not purchase what might have solaced his last moments—in that half-civilized region it could

scarcely buy the coarsest needful remedies; so with sickening hearts they saw him waste away hourly, and could do nothing.

He had been lying quite still for some time with his left hand clasped in Lindsay's—restlessness itself conquered by utter exhaustion—but neither asleep nor insensible, for they could catch as they bent over him the whisper of prayer which rose brokenly from his pale lips—when about three o'clock in the afternoon a sound of chimes from the beleaguered town floated across the sultry, motionless air, and hovered solemnly in the darkened room of the poor cabin. There seemed to be some meaning of the past in that knell to the sufferer's ear, for he made a feeble effort to rouse himself.

“What day is this?” he asked.

Lindsay tried to answer him, but could not—he signed to Ogilvie, who with more self-command, though not less emotion, stooped and said,

“The 21st of August. Dear Glencarrig, why?”

It was his birthday! A radiance seemed to spread over his wan face—they thought it only the reflection of a sunbeam which stole through a crevice in the crazy, swinging shutter—but the sunbeam crept by, and that light remained, the light of the everlasting Morning! He lifted his attenuated hands to Heaven, and smiling murmured,

“I am entered into mine inheritance!”

And so died.

* * * * *

His comrades watched him until evening fell, then silently and sorrowfully prepared to commit his body

to the dust. As they tenderly straightened the young frame so early mown down in its spring of manhood, and lifted the heavy hand from the cold bosom, they saw beneath it what both had repeatedly observed before—a little case of woman's handiwork suspended by a silken string—the last thing that hand had touched on earth. They were about to replace it, almost without looking at it, in their delicate respect, when Ogilvie hesitatingly suggested that it might contain some expression of his will after death, or valuable memoranda which he had been unable to mention. The supposition was so probable a one that with some reluctance Lindsay opened it. In one division they found only a letter and a worn, creased fragment of paper on which the pencil writing was almost effaced, except an entwined cipher which signed it; from the second he drew two long locks of hair looped together by a black ribbon—one fair and soft, of rich pale chestnut, on which the living lustre seemed yet to play, the other as glossy and as fine, but thicker and of the darkest brown—sad and sole memorials of the one love and the great friendship of his life!

They buried him in that foreign land, far away from all he loved, beneath the hot Spanish sky; and there, quiet in his dreamless rest as if he had slept in his beautiful native vale, beneath the shadow of the ancestral forests which had passed away into a stranger's hands, lay the mortal remains of David Bethune, the last Earl of Glencarrig.

THE END.

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